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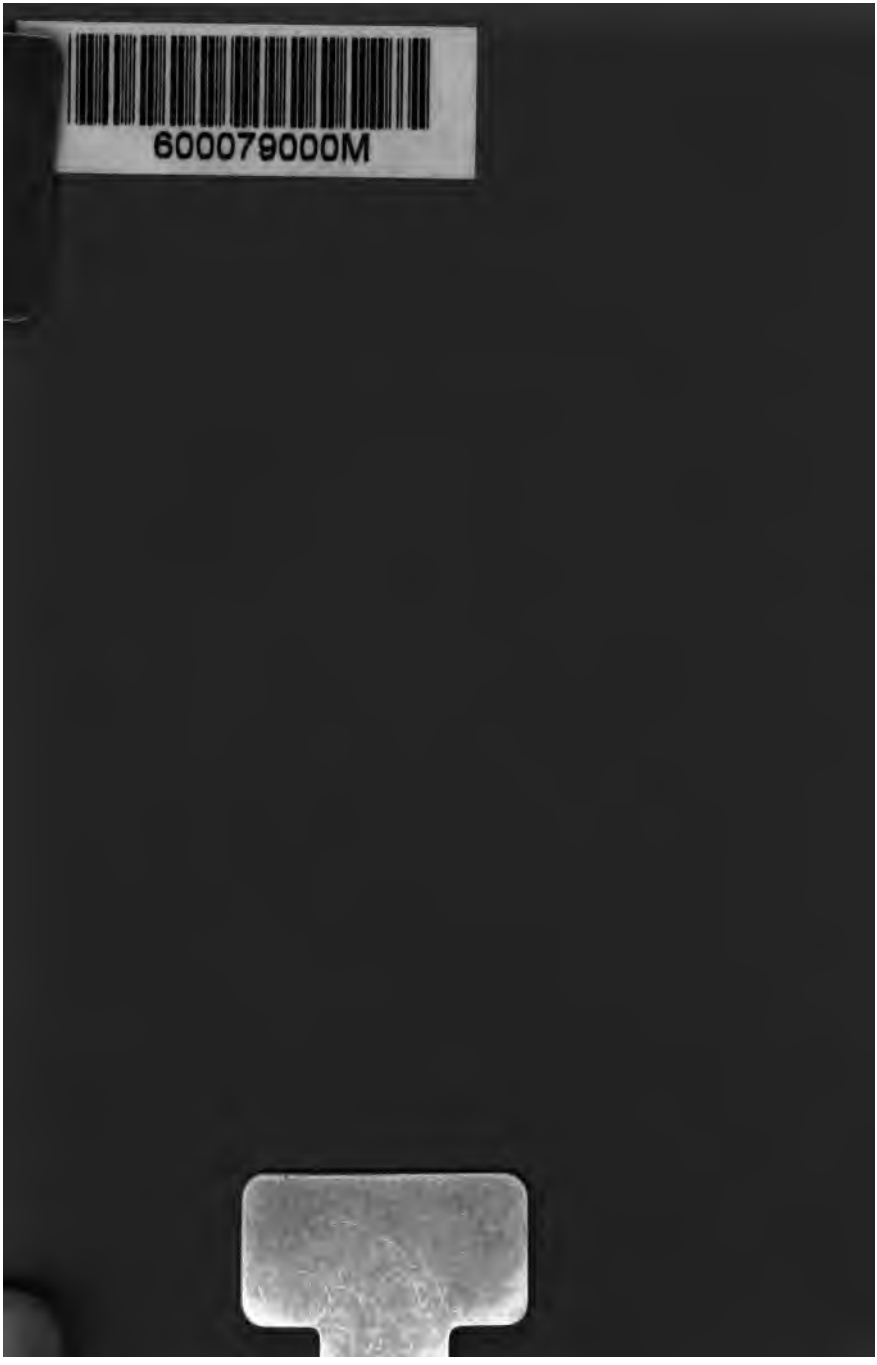
MIGNONETTE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MIGNONETTE.

'She stood with clasped hands and changeful colour, the strong gusty breeze blowing about her dress, fluttering her ribbons, and flinging to and fro her long curls.'—*Page* 80.

MIGNONETTE.

BY A. G.

AUTHOR OF "AMONG THE MOUNTAINS;" "MABEL AND CORA;"
"BEECHENHURST;" ETC.

"The blessing of her quiet life
Fell on us like the dew;
And good thoughts, where her footsteps passed,
Like fairy blossoms grew."

J. G. WHITTIER.

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MIGNONETTE.

CHAPTER I.

"Look not mournfully into the past;
It comes not back again."

LONGFELLOW.

IT was a bright spring day, late in the month of May. The little steep, rugged, old-fashioned, red-brick town of Rockstone Leigh lay basking in the clear sunshine, as if rejoicing that the long cold winter, with its wind and frost and snow, was at length over. In front lay the wide expanse of deep-blue sea, making the very sky look pale by contrast, covered with a thousand dancing sparkling ripples, speckled here and there with tiny tips of snowy foam, and dotted with many a small white sail, while in the far distance a large three-masted vessel sailed slowly by.

The scenery on land was very beautiful. Long lines of undulating hills stretched along the shore on

either side, with clear soft outlines, and rich slopes, wooded in many places to the water's edge. Above the town rose the graceful spire of the parish church, with the Rectory standing close by, almost buried in trees. While at a yet higher elevation, and considerably to the right, was to be seen Rockstone—or Rockstone Lodge, as it was sometimes called—commanding an extensive view of town and wood, hill and ocean.

It was a small curious irregular house, reddish in colour, and with an evident attempt at the Elizabethan in its style, which, however, had, unknown to the builder, occasionally diverged slightly into the grotesque. A garden, which, from the nature of the ground, was a mere succession of terraces, connected by steep flights of steps, extended some little distance down the hill, while a circuitous road practicable for carriages led to the town.

If the taste of the builder in respect to the exterior of the house was questionable, in respect to the interior it was no less so. The front door opened upon an ill-lighted hall, from which extended several narrow winding passages, still more badly-lighted, conducting to the different rooms. The most pleasant of these was the drawing-room, which stood on the ground-floor, and overlooked the sea. The windows here

were larger than in the rest of the house; and although the furniture was heavy and old-fashioned, there were many pretty and tasteful though very simple ornaments on the table and the mantel-piece, while books and work lay about in different directions.

Near the fire-place, in an easy-chair, sat an old lady—beautiful, erect, and stately still, despite the sixty-seven summers which had passed over her head. They had worn and aged her, removed the bloom from her cheek, and dimmed the brightness of her eye, yet even now none could have mistaken her for other than the original of the fine full-length oil-painting over the mantel-piece. It was a striking face as there depicted—oval in shape, with rich dark hair rolled off the forehead, which was broad though not high, a good nose, a bright fair complexion, a small firmly-closed mouth, and large well-opened brown eyes, clear, calm, and resolute in expression. Some of the determination and severity which had characterized her in after-life was to be read there, as well as traced still in the face of the dignified old lady below.

Opposite, and dressed like her in deep mourning, half-sitting and half-reclining upon a low couch, was a delicate-looking girl of about fifteen. She bore a strong family resemblance to her grandmother, but her complexion was sallow and sickly, her brown

eyes languid, her forehead slightly contracted, and her hands thin, white, and listless.

Once or twice Lady Isabelle Vincent glanced towards her with a somewhat annoyed expression, and evidently restrained herself with difficulty from speaking. At length she could bear it no longer, and said, in a voice which was decided and authoritative, though at the same time kind, quiet, and exceedingly ladylike—

"Antonia, are you going to waste the whole afternoon?"

"I don't know, grandmamma. I have nothing to do," was the answer, in a voice which, though sweet, matched well in its listless indifference with her face and manner.

"My dear, I would find something, if I were you."

"I have been reading," said Antonia.

"Reading what?"

Antonia hesitated, and was obliged to take up the volume before she could answer—"'The Siege of Derry.' It is a story that Josephine Halifax lent me. But I have not read much."

"No, I should think not, if you could not even tell me the name. I wish you would try to overcome this habit of day-dreaming, Antonia. Time was not given us to be frittered away in such a manner. I

cannot help feeling convinced that you would be far happier, if your father would allow you to begin regular lessons again."

Antonia's lips moved slightly as if in dissent, but no sound was audible. Then the door was flung open, and a bright-faced boy, of thirteen or fourteen, sprang gaily in.

"Do you know where your father is, Guy?" asked Lady Isabelle.

"I saw him in the town, grandmamma. He said he was going—I forget where. Something else put it out of my head. Aubrey, and Gordon, and I are going out for an hour's row, and Alison says she will go with us. We want Annie to come too. Alison will keep us all steady, so it will be quite safe. Do, Annie,—there's such a lovely breeze, that I'm sure it would do you good."

Lady Isabelle suspended her knitting, with a look of anxiety on her face, so slight that a casual observer would not have noticed it. As slight was the disappointed expression that followed Antonia's answer.

"I can't, Guy, dear. I can't walk up the hill."

"Not if Aubrey, and Cyril or I, gave you our arms, one on each side? Why, we should almost carry you."

The eager boy bent over his sister as he spoke.

"Do, Annie, just try for once; it is the very day for you, the water dancing beautifully, but not a bit rough."

"I tried going down with papa, a day or two ago, only a little way, and I could hardly walk up again," said Antonia gently. "It seems to take all my breath away. Don't wait for me, Guy."

"If you would only rouse yourself to try it a little oftener," said Lady Isabelle, in a tone which sounded almost harsh to her grandchildren, neither of whom had an idea of the disappointment she felt at the failure of Guy's attempt, "I am sure you might do much more, Antonia."

"She can't do more than she has strength for, grandmamma," said Guy rather hastily. "Of course I don't want to knock her up, only I thought she might like to go."

"It is a great pity you do not at least make the attempt, Antonia," said Lady Isabelle again. "I shall say no more, as your father does not like your being urged,—but you would be far happier exerting yourself than sitting idly here all day."

Antonia attempted no reply. Guy glanced down at the book on her knee.

"Are you reading?" he asked.

"Yes—no—not much," said Antonia. "You will keep them all waiting, Guy."

"Won't you come out and sit in the garden?" he asked, lingering still. "I would find you a nice shady place."

Again Lady Isabelle looked anxious, but Antonia still seemed listlessly indifferent, though she thanked her brother with a gentle smile.

"I would much rather sit quiet, Guy. It only tires me to move about."

"Well, if you would really rather," said Guy, regretfully. "Good-bye, then. Dinner's an hour late to-day, isn't it, grandmamma? Cyril was sure he heard you say so."

"Yes, it is put off till six o'clock. Mind you are back in time, Guy."

Guy nodded, and ran away. The shortest way to the shore was through the garden. Straight down the steep flights of stone steps leading from terrace to terrace, into a narrow rugged path, and thence over a large rough mound of chalk and shingles, he dashed with headlong speed, never pausing till he reached the beach.

There was a group waiting for him at the water's edge. A small rowing-boat was already launched, rising and falling with the wavelets that swept under it, and then broke with pleasant music upon the shingles. A sailor sat at one end, keeping it close to

the shore by means of an oar. Guy's two elder brothers, Aubrey and Cyril, stood near, besides Alison Winnington, Gordon Halifax, and Alison's two little boys, Conrad and Alick, aged respectively eight and six.

Alison Winnington, as the lady of the party, merits the first notice. She was the wife of the Rev. Marcus Winnington, who was first cousin to the young Vincents, and had lately become rector of Rockstone Leigh. Every one liked Alison—not so much because she was young, and pretty, and lady-like, as for her gentle kindness, and her readiness to enter into the feelings of others. It was scarcely more than a month since her husband had quitted his former curacy to enter on his new sphere of duty, but already Alison was gaining the affections of all who had been thrown with her in the little sea-side town.

Aubrey Vincent was a tall fine-looking youth, not far from eighteen years old. With the exception of his manly well-built figure, and short dark hair, he was almost a facsimile of the oil painting in Rockstone drawing-room—a youthful likeness of his grandmother. There were the same calm brown eyes, the same broad forehead, the same small determined mouth, the same proud self-possessed air, mingled, however, with boyish energy and spirit.

Cyril was a slender lad, nearly a year older than Antonia, and very unlike Aubrey. He had the family eyes, but they were dreamy and quiet, his manner was retiring, almost to timidity, and his face was quite too gentle and pretty for a boy of his age, with its pink-and-white complexion, the colour of which came and went like a girl's.

Gordon Halifax, a stout square-built lad of about fifteen, was the youngest son of Mr. Halifax, the chief medical practitioner not only in Rockstone Leigh but in the country round. Gordon was usually considered to be a great friend and companion of Guy's, but it must be confessed that the latter might have found a better friend. Gordon was a good-tempered fellow, but he had a troublesome faculty for getting into mischief, and dragging Guy in with him.

"I couldn't get her to come," panted the latter, as he reached the waiting group. "Such a pity!"

"Did she not care for it?" asked Aubrey.

"She said she could not walk up the hill."

"Would there be no possibility of taking her up in a carriage?" inquired Alison. "That would not fatigue her."

"She went for a drive this morning," said Cyril. "Papa takes her almost every day."

He did not add that they could not well afford to

do more, but Alison knew enough of their affairs to conjecture this.

"Papa has proposed once or twice that she should walk down and drive up," said Guy; "but she never seems to care for it, and he won't have her teased."

"It seems so sad that she should continue in this state," said Alison compassionately. "I wish something could be done to rouse the poor child, and give her an interest in anything."

"I wish *you* could do it, Alison," said Aubrey. "We have all tried in vain."

"I must try and see a little more of her," Alison remarked. "Now that we are really getting settled, I hope I shall not be quite so busy."

"I am afraid you cannot look for much leisure, between the parish and your boys," said Aubrey. "But we must not wait any longer, or there will not be time for our row before dinner."

Alison looked doubtfully at the boat, and then at Conrad and Alick.

"I wish I could let them go without me," she said; "I might have gone to see Antonia. But they are so wild, that I dare not trust them on the water unless I am with them."

They all exclaimed simultaneously against any such plan. She was assisted into the boat, the boys

then following. Aubrey remained behind, whispered something to the sailor, helped him to push out the boat, and stepped back just as they expected him to leap in.

"Why, Aubrey, are you not coming?" shouted two or three voices.

"No, I'm going to look up Annie. She has been pining away the whole day, and I don't care for a row this afternoon."

There was a chorus of remonstrances from the boat. "But you like boating so much!" "Aubrey, let me go?" "No, I'll go—I really would rather." "Put back, Smith, and take him up!"

"Row out, Smith, for I am not coming," was Aubrey's counter order, and between the two Smith's oar remained motionless, while a broad smile overspread his face. "It's of no use your coming back, for I shall be out of reach before you can land," Aubrey added with decision, striding away at the same instant with a speed that bid fair to distance all pursuers of ordinary powers.

"Tiresome fellow! he will have his own way as usual, I suppose," said Guy. "Why didn't I guess what he was after? I should have been as glad as anything to go and see after poor Annie. And Aubrey's desperately fond of boating."

"All the nicer of him to give it up for such a reason," said Alison warmly.

"Oh, he'll do anything for Annie," said Guy, evidently thinking the act a less striking one than Alison appeared to do.

"He might have sent me at any rate," Cyril remarked in his quiet way. "He knows very well that I don't care for it one quarter so much as he does."

"But, perhaps, he did not wish you to lose even that *quarter* of pleasure," said Alison, smiling, and thinking, in her young motherly heart, that she should be very glad when she could see some symptoms of such a self-denying spirit in her little wilful Conrad.

CHAPTER II.

" What tale is this?"—MRS. HEMANS.

"AUBREY! I thought you were going out in the boat?" said Antonia, as he entered the drawing-room.

"No, the others have gone," replied Aubrey, coming up to the sofa. "I thought I should prefer a little walk with you in the garden."

Lady Isabelle gave him one of the pleased proud glances which she bestowed upon none but him, and which Aubrey valued accordingly. Antonia raised herself from her reclining attitude with a reproachful—

"Oh, how could you? Oh, Aubrey, I am so sorry."

"How could I like it best?" asked Aubrey. "Well, really there is no accounting for tastes. Where's your hat?"

"My garden-hat is in the hall, I believe. But I wish you would go in the boat."

"I should have a long swim before I could overtake it," returned Aubrey. "Do you want a shawl?"

"Yes, she must have one," said Lady Isabelle; "there is a keenness in the air still. That little light one on the bed in my room will do. I will fetch it for her."

But Aubrey was gone, and almost before she could have reached the door, he returned with both hat and shawl.

"Now, Annie, let me wrap it round you. That's right. Don't you think I should make a capital lady's-maid?"

Antonia laughed, and made no attempt to protest against going out. Leaning on his strong steady arm, she allowed him to conduct her into the garden, and down one flight of steps, but there she paused.

"I can't go farther, Aubrey. I could not walk up again."

"We will walk about here, then, for a little while," said Aubrey. "When do you mean to come again for a ramble over the sands with me, Annie?"

"Oh! I don't know," and the words were broken by a long heavy sigh.

"It would do you good, I am sure,—you never have any change now."

"I don't want any," said Antonia listlessly.

"But we want it for you. Annie, you don't think we can be happy and contented to see you go on as you do now."

"I can't help it," returned Antonia sorrowfully. "I don't feel as if I *could* do any of the things I used to do with——"

She did not finish the sentence, but no more was needed. A very sad look came into Aubrey's face, and the next two or three turns up and down the terrace walk were in silence. He could not trust himself yet to speak on the loss which was still so fresh and vivid, though now ten months old; and he did not know how much better almost any amount of conversation and tears would have been for Antonia, than this constant silent brooding over a grief which was never alluded to in her presence.

"Are you tired, dear?" he asked presently. "Suppose you come again on the upper terrace, and sit on the end seat. After all, the view is best and the air freshest there."

Antonia assented, and placing his arm round her waist, he half-lifted her up the steep steps. Even thus the exertion made her pant for breath, and he

looked anxiously at her as she sat down, leaning her face against his shoulder.

"I wish I could see you a little stronger, poor child. Annie, how do you like Alison?"

"I don't know—I like her," said Antonia. "I haven't seen much of her."

"We all think her very nice and pleasant," remarked Aubrey cheerfully. "Could you not step into the Rectory some day in one of your drives? You would hardly know the place again, it is so improved."

"She said she would come as often as she could, and see me here. I like that best."

"I am afraid she won't find time to come very often though. You see she is expected to do no end of things in the parish, and those little chaps of hers must take up a great deal of her time. She has been used to flat country, too, and finds it rather a pull up the hill, not like us who have been bred to the kind of thing."

"Like me, I think," said Antonia, with a little smile. "Marcus said she was not very strong. Oh, Aubrey, there is some one calling you."

Aubrey answered, and a man came up, by name Ralph, by occupation gardener in particular and everything in general.

"My lady wishes to see you, sir, in the drawing-room."

"Any caller?" asked Aubrey.

"I believe not, sir. My master is there also."

Aubrey rose, asking, "Are you rested, Annie? Lean well on me, and you won't be so tired. Why, you are as light as a feather. Can't you make more of your weight than that?"

Antonia laughed, and said she would try. In a few minutes they reached the house, and he took off her hat and shawl, threw them on a table, led her into the drawing-room, laid her on the sofa, and then turned to his grandmother.

She was sitting where they had left her, with an open letter in her hand, and a look of mingled annoyance and excitement upon her usually calm face. Mr. Vincent was not present.

"Have you heard any disagreeable news, grandmamma?" asked Aubrey. "I thought I should find papa here."

"He will be back directly. Yes, we have heard some news. Your father and I differ as to its being disagreeable."

"Is papa pleased?" asked Antonia. "What is it, grandmamma?"

Lady Isabelle answered the question by another.

"You have heard of your uncle Everard Mignon, have you not?"

"Poor aunt Laura's husband," said Aubrey. "Oh, yes, I have heard of him. I know very little about him, though. Was he not a friend of papa's before they were married? And did they not marry on the same day?"

Lady Isabelle made a sign of assent.

"And then he and aunt Laura went to live abroad —no, not directly, but in a little while, after the failure of some bank or business with which uncle Everard had to do."

"That was four years after their marriage. Your aunt's death took place within six months of their going abroad. We heard nothing of or from them during that time. And then there was only a short note from Mr. Mignon, mentioning his wife's death, but giving no particulars, and sending no address, so of course we could not communicate with him."

"What a strange idea!" remarked Aubrey. "What could have been his reason, grandmamma? I don't remember ever hearing that before."

"There was no particular object in telling you. But we have now no choice about the matter."

"And what was the reason, grandmamma?" repeated Aubrey. "What is your news?"

"I am going to tell you now. More strangely still, you will think"—and there was a slight bitterness in the tone of the words, which perplexed her hearers—"Mr. Mignon never informed us that he had a little girl—a baby of scarcely a month old at the time she lost her mother—just about Antonia's age."

"My age! A little girl!" exclaimed Antonia, starting up. "Oh, grandmamma, is she alive now? How did you hear of her?"

"By some letters from Brussels," said Lady Isabelle drily, while Aubrey was more occupied in watching his sister than even in listening to the unexpected news. It was long since he had seen such a look of interest on her face.

"And shall we see her, grandmamma? How strange that I should have had a cousin all this time without knowing it—a cousin of my own age, I mean. Where is she?"

"At a school in Brussels. She has been there ever since her father's death, seven years ago."

"You saw his death in a newspaper, did you not?" asked Aubrey doubtfully.

"Your father was in Paris, and saw it quite by accident in a French newspaper two or three months old, left in a drawer of his room. He went to the

house where Mr. Mignon died, but the hotel or apartments—I forget which it was—had passed into other hands, and he could discover nothing about him. The people professed utter ignorance. Whether they spoke the truth or not, your father could not discover. We always imagined that such little property as he had with him must have been stolen, but it now appears that either a part or the whole of it was sent to your cousin at Brussels."

"I suppose her name and address were found among his things?" said Antonia. "Was uncle Everard rich?"

"No," Lady Isabelle replied rather shortly. "I believe he had a small annuity, left him for life by some distant relation, not long before he left England. It was not probable however that when he died he should have had no money with him, and it appears that none was sent to your cousin."

"I dare say it and some of his luggage were stolen," remarked Aubrey. "Otherwise it is singular that papa should have been able to find out nothing about him so soon afterwards."

"Not so singular as it appears, perhaps. Mr. Mignon arrived only a few hours before his death, and was an entire stranger there. But you will like to read this letter from your cousin."

Antonia received the sheet of thin foreign paper, and Aubrey knelt with one knee on the sofa by her side, that he might look over her shoulder. It ran as follows :—

"My dear Uncle,—

"Madame is writing a long letter to you, and she says I ought to do the same. But I hardly know what to say, except that I am very very glad to find I have some relations in England. Madame has always been as kind as possible to me, and I love her dearly, but still I have often longed to feel that I had some one really belonging to me. Until a day or two ago I did not know I had a relation in the whole world. It seems so *so* strange.

"Madame says I ought to tell you all about myself. But I think she will do that much better than I can. I have been in her school a long long time—ever since I was six years old. Dear Papa brought me, and left me here. He used to come sometimes and see me, and have me with him for the holidays, until I was eight years old, and then one day I had a letter from him to say that he was going to Paris for a week, and that afterwards he would come and spend some weeks at Brussels. I remember how

happy I was, and then how dreadful it seemed only two or three days afterwards to have a letter from a strange person at Paris, saying that he had died quite suddenly in her apartments, the very night after he arrived. She sent me his trunk and his desk, and two or three little things that he always had with him, and that was all.

"I never shall forget how terrible it was—though I was so very young—and how kind dear Madame was to me. I did not know of a single relation or friend in the whole world. She said I must live with her until a better home was offered to me. We looked through the papers in his desk, at least Madame did, but there was nothing in them that helped us. Mr. Percival, a kind English gentleman then in Brussels, advised Madame to advertise about me in some English newspapers, and he saw after it himself, but they had no answer, so they soon made up their minds that I really had no relations at all, or that if I had, they would have nothing to do with me. I never knew till lately *how* kind Mr. and Miss Percival were, for they insisted on paying dear Madame for my schooling. I tell you this, because Madame says you ought to know everything about me. But I am afraid I am writing a strange letter. Please forgive me, if I am.

"It was only last week that a new girl, Mary Williams, came here, and when she heard my name—which was not for one or two days—she said what a curious one it was, and that she had only heard it once before. Madame thought it might be a relation, so she at once asked for particulars, and then Mary said that the name of the gentleman she meant was Everard Mignon, that she believed he had died abroad, and that he was a connection of her own—his mother having been the first cousin of her grandmother. Was it not singular? We soon found out that I had an uncle living at Rockstone Leigh, and some cousins too, Mary says, though she does not know how many, or what are their names. Mary advised me to write at once to you. I do not know whether it is right, or whether dear Papa would not have wished it, but Madame thinks it best, and Mr. and Miss Percival are travelling somewhere in Italy, so we cannot ask their advice. Mary says she is sure you are very kind, and will not be displeased; for though she has never seen you, she has often heard about you. She told me too of your sad loss—and oh! I am so sorry. Please forgive me for troubling you, and believe me,

"Your affectionate niece,

"INA MIGNON."

"Ina! What a pretty name!" said Antonia. "But I do wonder we have never heard of her before."

"It is hardly to be wondered at, considering the circumstances," said Lady Isabelle. "Living in a quiet Brussels school, she was not very likely to meet with friends or relations of ours, though it was of course always possible, and has at last occurred."

"Williams!" Aubrey repeated; "I don't remember the name particularly. Do you know them, grandmamma?"

"Not personally. I have heard of them occasionally. The mother is a widow, and I believe a nice person."

"Mary Williams' mother, you mean," said Aubrey. "It is strange that no one should have seen the advertisements. But have you heard from Madame herself, grandmamma?"

"Yes, there is a long letter in French to your father. He has taken it away with him. The particulars mentioned are much the same as in your cousin's letter. Ina was left in the school when only six years old, and Madame occasionally saw her father, but he always displayed the utmost reserve concerning his own affairs, and though she more than once inquired whether the child had any near relatives besides himself, she never could obtain a direct answer.

Once only he admitted that *if* she had any, they were unaware of her very existence."

"Incomprehensible," muttered Aubrey. "Can you imagine any reason, grandmamma, for such conduct? Why should he have wished to keep her from us?"

Lady Isabelle made no answer. Aubrey did not think her expression betokened ignorance, and he asked again—

"Do you suppose this cousin—this Miss Williams—knew the reason of uncle Everard's wish for secresy?"

"Certainly not!" replied Lady Isabelle, with decision. "Madame says they all feel completely bewildered as to the cause."

"Do *you* know the reason, grandmamma?"

"You had better ask your father anything that you wish to know," was Lady Isabelle's brief response.

"Does he know, and does he wish us not to hear?" Antonia inquired.

"He prefers that you should not."

Aubrey laughed a little.

"It is mysterious, certainly. But I suppose we must be content to remain in a state of unsatisfied curiosity. Does Madame—what is her name?"

"Madame Boucher."

"Does she say anything about Mr. Percival?"

"Yes. He is an English gentleman, residing or rather travelling abroad, on account of his sister's health. A kind but eccentric person, apparently. He is only at Brussels occasionally, but the money for Ina's education has been regularly remitted."

"A strange idea that a cousin of ours should have been indebted to strangers in such a way—positively almost living on charity!" Aubrey remarked, flushing slightly. "What does papa think of doing?"

Mr. Vincent himself entered the room before Lady Isabelle could answer. Tall in figure—grave, thoughtful, even sad in expression—he was in feature sufficiently like both his mother and son to render the relationship unmistakable. The resemblance would have been yet more striking, but that there was in his bearing a courteous gentleness which had never been worn by the former, and was not yet developed in the latter,—a refined politeness which appeared in every word and action, however trivial. He bent slightly over the couch as he passed, with a glance of anxious concern at his daughter's face, and then advanced towards his mother, remarking—

"I suppose you have heard our news by this time, Aubrey?"

"Grandmamma has been telling us, papa," replied Aubrey. "I can't make it out at all. What could have been uncle's reason?"

"It is singular, certainly," said Mr. Vincent, quietly passing over the question. "Annie, how would you like a new adopted sister?"

A flush came to Antonia's face. "I should like it very much," she said, "if Ina is nice."

"Have you decided to bring her here?" asked Lady Isabelle, in a tone which was the nearest approach she ever made to combating her son's resolutions.

"Have you any objection, mother?" inquired Mr. Vincent. "It seems to me the only right thing to be done."

"Why not leave her where she is? She has friends, and we are strangers to her. It was her father's wish, and you would, of course, undertake necessary expenses. She really has no claims upon you whatever."

"Except the claims of kindred and orphanhood," he said. "Mother, I could never be happy to leave the poor child in such a situation while I have a home to offer her, unless she should prefer it."

"As she probably will."

"It is possible, but I do not think it very likely.

She evidently feels that school is not like home. Besides, I cannot at all think that her father would really have preferred her remaining there. I feel convinced that he only feared——" Mr. Vincent broke off, and added, "I had thought of starting the day after to-morrow."

"You! Surely, Horace, she can travel to England alone! That would indeed be unnecessary trouble."

"But perhaps I should enjoy the trip, instead of considering it a trouble," said Mr. Vincent, smiling. "I should much prefer to answer the letters in person, and I shall only send one line to say I am coming. You must not be uneasy about her, mother. I do not at all doubt that we shall find her a pleasant inmate, after Madame Boucher's account, and I will take every care that she shall not trouble you in any way."

Lady Isabelle resumed her work in silence, with rather a cloud upon her brow. Antonia leant back on the sofa, with the old weary shadow creeping over her face as her father left the room. Aubrey said nothing, but privately wondered whether his cousin would wish to leave the friends of so many years' standing, even though they were but governesses and schoolfellows, to enter amongst a set of unknown relations.

CHAPTER III.

"A maid unmatched in manners as in face."—POPE'S HOMER.

"Thou whose locks outshine the sun,
Golden tresses, wreathed in one,
As the braided streamlets run!

"Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet."

LONGFELLOW.

"NUMBER sixteen, Rue St. ——," said Mr. Vincent to himself, as he glanced at the address in his hand. "Yes, this is it."

He rang, and the door was opened by a little French maid. Though, from want of recent practice, not a very fluent speaker of her language, he made himself understood without difficulty, and after giving her his card, was shown into a room, where he was requested to wait.

It was not exactly such a parlour as to accord

with our English ideas of comfort. There was no carpet on the floor, and the furniture was much worn; but sufficient compensation for this was no doubt to be found—at least in Madame Boucher's opinion—in the various ornaments scattered about, including a handsome gilt clock on the mantel-piece, under a glass case, the time-piece being supported by a large yellow lazy-looking Belgian lion.

Mr. Vincent noticed, however, neither the faded furniture nor the grand clock, nor even the carpetless floor, though his eyes were bent steadily and sadly upon the latter. Other thoughts of a very different nature were pressing upon his mind, and he did not once look up until the opening of the door caused him to rise.

A plump bright-looking little Frenchwoman, of lady-like appearance, came in, followed by a young girl. Not so tall as Antonia—Mr. Vincent could see that at a glance—but small and almost childish in figure, yet gracefully formed, with fairy-like hands and feet. The profuse rich light-brown hair, tinted with shining gold, was swept off her face, kept back by one simple massive plait, passed like a coronet over the well-shaped head, and allowed to fall behind in heavy curls. The features were irregular but delicate; the brows clearly defined; the mouth gentle

and grave, yet mobile and impetuous; the shady grey eyes exceedingly soft and loving, laughing and serious by turns, yet full of sweet womanly thoughtfulness.

"Mr. Vincent, I believe," said the lady, as she bowed and drew her companion forward. She spoke in good English, though with a strong French accent. "Allow me to introduce ma petite Mignonne—that is to say, your niece, Ina Mignon."

Mr. Vincent did not wait for the introduction. He bowed in silence to Madame Boucher, then advancing a step, he took both Ina's hands in his own, and gave her a grave kind kiss.

"Pray sit down," said Madame politely, and he complied, placing a chair by his side for Ina, and still retaining her hand in his. "This is a singular event, Monsieur. Can it indeed be that you have hitherto known nothing of your niece?"

"Nothing whatever," replied Mr. Vincent. "I have been as ignorant of her very existence as she appears to have been of mine."

Madame Boucher shook her head with a perplexed air, and slightly shrugged her shoulders.

"C'est singulier. It is not comprehensible. But your niece is greatly obliged that you should take so much trouble to see her. She has not in all this time

quite lost her English shyness, or she would herself inform you so."

Ina's face confirmed her words. "It is so kind, uncle," she said gently. "I did not dare to hope I should see you so soon."

"Did you think it a matter of such small importance to me to find I had a new niece?" asked Mr. Vincent, smiling, yet with some degree of emotion in his face. "You are very like your poor father, Ina."

"Am I?" asked Ina gravely. "Did you know papa well—at least—I mean, did you often see him?"

"He was a great friend of mine when we were both young. Until he went to live abroad, I was in constant communication with him." Then, without waiting for the questions that he saw were coming, he added, "You don't look such a French girl as I expected to find you."

"La Mignonne is not French at all," said Madame. "Excuse the name that we always call her. I cannot recollect that it may sound strange."

"I like the name," Mr. Vincent replied, and Ina observed timidly—

"The English girls and Miss Andrews call me Mignonette. I hardly ever hear the word Ina."

"Ah! she will one day forget her own name," remarked Madame Boucher. "I often warn her so. But she was so petite—so small—so young—when she first came—we cannot yet drop the baby-name."

There was a slight pause, broken by Mr. Vincent.

"Well, Ina, I must not delay any longer telling you the true object of my journey here. It is not only to pay you a little visit. Do you think I can persuade you to come with me, and be a Mignonette of my own?"

Madame's handkerchief was raised to her eyes, with a murmured—"Ah! je l'ai pensé!" though she smiled a little at her pupil's bewildered face. Evidently the idea was a new one to Ina, and she hardly knew what to answer, if indeed she yet fully comprehended the proposal. Mr. Vincent waited patiently, that she might have time for thought.

"La pauvre petite!" Madame observed. "I ought not to grieve that she finds her friends. Many many times have I longed it for her. But we shall miss sorely our Mignonne."

Ina's eyes were raised to her uncle's face with an earnest anxious expression. "Please, will you tell me?" she said. "You and Madame. I don't know what papa would have wished. He left me here you know."

"I think he would have wished you to come and live with me, dear."

Ina looked distressed and doubting.

"I can't understand it," she murmured. "If he wanted me to be with you, why did he not——?"

The sentence was unfinished, but Mr. Vincent understood what she wished to say, and was touched by her troubled expression.

"It was a mistake, my dear," he said gravely. "It arose from a misconception on your father's part. He did not know what a welcome his little daughter would receive in my house, but rather fancied it would be otherwise. Such at least I imagine to have been the reason for his conduct."

"Why should he?" Ina very naturally asked, and then she blushed deeply. "I beg your pardon, uncle, I did not mean to be inquisitive."

"You are not inquisitive, but this is a question that I cannot very well answer. I feel convinced that if your father's death had been less sudden, he would not have left either you or me in such ignorance concerning each other. Will you trust me when I say that I have not a doubt of his willingness —were he still living—to let you come to me, under present circumstances? If you are not happy with us, I will at any time arrange for you to return to

Madame Boucher, but I hope there is no fear of that."

"Madame must say," replied Ina slowly, though with rapidly-changing colour. "Papa left me with her."

"Madame Boucher cannot decide unless she knows what you wish, my child. Would you be afraid to come amongst strange relations?"

Ina thought she could be afraid of nothing by the side of this kind gentle uncle, and her bright glance said so unmistakably.

"Would you prefer to remain where you are a little while longer? I am not proposing this for my own sake, for I long to carry you home to my poor Antonia. But you must do whatever will make you the happiest."

Ina rose and went to Madame Boucher, taking her hand beseechingly.

"Please, Madame, will you tell me?" she said earnestly. "What shall I do?"

"Ma Mignonne, your uncle speaks truly. I cannot decide for you unless I am acquainted with your wishes."

"Then you do not think papa wished me to stay here always?" faltered Ina.

"Truly not in preference to so happy a home,"

said Madame—perhaps taking the fact rather for granted that Mr. Vincent's home *was* a happy one. "You wish to go, ma Mignonne?"

"I should like it—I want to live in England," Ina began, and then breaking off, she fairly threw herself into Madame Boucher's arms, and burst into tears. "Oh, Madame!—dear, kind Madame!—it is not that I am ungrateful, or wish to leave you. I have been very very happy here."

"Mais non—je le comprends bien, ma petite," said the lady, embracing her pupil warmly. "Would it not be strange, were you to choose by preference the school to the home? I cannot expect such of you."

"And the girls—and Miss Andrews—and Mr. and Miss Percival—I don't know how to go away from them all," murmured Ina tearfully.

A slight motion of Mr. Vincent's drew her again, half unconsciously, to his side, and again he took her hands in his.

"My dear, you must not do what will give you pain. If you would prefer to remain here a year or two longer, and then come to live with me, I will say nothing against it. I shall be disappointed, and so will your cousins, but we will wait till you are willing to come. I would not ask you to accompany me now, against your will."

Ina was silent and thoughtful.

"It is not against my will, uncle," she said at length, quite steadily and firmly. "I should like to go with you."

"Then it shall be with the understanding, that if at the end of three months you wish to return here, I will arrange for you to do so, if Madame is still willing to receive you."

"No fear about that," said Madame rather sadly. "I am but too grieved to lose her. Yet I must not be selfish. You will wish, Monsieur, to remove her soon?"

"I must return home in the course of a week. Will that be too sudden, Ina?"

"La petite shall be ready," Madame answered for her.

"Then we may look upon it as settled," said Mr. Vincent, drawing Ina towards him, and kissing her. "My dear, you must not forget that you belong to me now."

Ina glanced confidingly in his face, with dewy yet smiling eyes.

"It is so kind," she said. "And you say papa would have wished it?"

"I do not feel the slightest doubt about that."

She looked satisfied at the quiet decided tone.

"You know best, uncle," she said, with in-

stinctive trust in his word, stranger though he was to her. "I will come with you whenever you wish."

"We will not determine upon the day this evening. There will be plenty of time for that. Do you think you can take a little walk with me now, that we may become somewhat better acquainted?"

Ina's face brightened, and she looked at Madame Boucher.

"Certainement! with great pleasure. Run, ma Mignonne, and make yourself ready."

Ina obeyed, and as the door closed behind her, Madame added—

"She is a sweet girl, this niece of yours, Monsieur. I know not how we shall spare her to you."

"I am at a loss, Madame, how to express my gratitude for your kind and most generous care of her," was Mr. Vincent's answer. "It seems hardly fair to rob you of her so suddenly. I do not forget that I ought to have given a quarter's notice before removing her, but under the peculiar circumstances of the case I feel sure you will offer no objections. In a pecuniary point of view, I will of course take care that you are no loser by it," he added courteously.

Madame bowed slightly.

"But we shall be losers sadly," she said. "Your

niece has been our Mignonne—our little darling—for nine years, and I know not what we shall do without her."

Mr. Vincent was silent for a moment.

"You mentioned in your letter," he said at length, "that Mr. Percival was so kind as to undertake the expenses——"

Madame's motion of assent made the conclusion of the sentence unnecessary, and he merely added—

"May I ask whether her dress and personal expenses were included, Madame?"

"Perhaps not entirely," said Madame Boucher, hesitating a little. "It was, in truth, a pleasure to me to act as if she were my own little Mignonne. I have not lost anything by it. And you may not speak of this again, Monsieur."

"I will leave the subject till another day," said Mr. Vincent quietly. "I must ask you then for Mr. Percival's address, that I may write to him."

"La Mignonne has it. She received a letter from him but this morning. But I am desirous to speak to you on the commencement of this singular history. It was so strange the way in which her father left her with me. He so gentleman-like, so pleasant,—she so pretty, so fairy-like,—and yet he would not tell me one word of their relations."

"Did he give you to understand that they had none?"

"No; not so. He only would not speak upon the subject. It was, of course, no concern to me, and I could not interfere. Only once I said, 'If, Monsieur, the little one's English relations should come when you are far away, what will I do about it?' for his manner was so strange that I could not understand. And he answered, 'No one will come; I wish I could think they would. But if I have any relatives, Madame, they know not even that I have a little girl!' And his look detained me from asking any more. The poor Monsieur! It was very strange!"

"Strange, indeed!" Mr. Vincent repeated with a sigh. "I cannot understand it."

"And yet, in all other things, the poor gentleman appeared rational enough," remarked Madame Boucher, in a tone of pity.

"Rational! Did you think him at all——" Mr. Vincent hesitated for a word, and Madame significantly touched her forehead as she responded—

"I doubt not, Monsieur, that poor M. Mignon's mind was sadly weakened by trouble and care, though I know not of what kind. How otherwise could he

shrink from introducing our Mignonne to her so kind relations?"

"Madame is kind to take it for granted that we are so," said Mr. Vincent gravely.

"Ah, Monsieur, there are people in whom one cannot be mistaken—even in one little half hour of conversation. But, indeed, I have heard much concerning you through my young pupil, Miss Williams. Many traits have been related to her of your generous disposition and benevolent heart."

What answer could Mr. Vincent make beyond a slight bow, in which, however, there was a certain dignity that checked further personal remarks of a flattering description, and the lady continued—

"Then you heard not one word, Monsieur, of the child from her father?"

"Not even of her existence." Mr. Vincent paused a moment, but Madame Boucher looked curious, and he resumed, "We were great friends from boyhood upwards, although he was five years or so my senior. Afterwards we married sisters, our weddings taking place on the same day. Four years later they went abroad, and on their part all intercourse with us was entirely dropped for about six months. Then there came a few lines from Everard Mignon, to inform us of his wife's death, but without

date, without a word of where he was then residing, without an allusion to the child she had left. You say in your letters that Ina was fifteen in March, so at that time she could not have been a month old. Frequently afterwards I inquired and advertised, but I could hear nothing more of Mr. Mighon for years. At last, on a visit to Paris, I saw, by the strangest accident, the mention of his death in a newspaper about three months old. When I went to the house to seek for particulars, I was told that the apartments were in the hands of new-comers, and they professed themselves entirely ignorant of the whole matter."

This narration was given in a low tone of strong feeling. Madame Boucher listened with riveted attention.

"It is utterly incomprehensible," she said. "And you know not any reason for this so singular conduct of the poor Monsieur's?"

"I cannot quite say that. There were family affairs that no doubt formed the foundation. But it was a strange fancy—a sad mistake! I cannot but think with you, that it must have arisen from a mind weakened and disordered by trouble. Did he appear in bad health when you saw him?"

"Indeed, he was at all times far from strong," replied Madame Boucher; "and well I remember

the last interview I had with him. He said to me, 'I feel so happy to think my little one is in good hands. You will take every care of her, Madame?' And I promised warmly, as you may think, Monsieur. Then he said again, 'I trust she may be many many years with you. But you must promise me to bring her up an Englishwoman, Madame. She must learn to love her own country even before she sees it.' And truly I have tried to fulfil his wish. La pauvre petite has been happy, and she is an Englishwoman at heart, though she has never seen her native land."

"Was that all he wished for her?" asked Mr. Vincent, in a low troubled tone.

"It was not all I promised, for I said, 'Monsieur, I will strive to bring her up an Englishwoman, and a Christian too. I will strive to teach her love to her country, and I will pray that she may also learn to love her Saviour.' And he clasped my hand, but said nothing. Yet I think it was his desire. Sometimes he would hear her repeat her pretty English texts and hymns—for her Bible-reading and learning was always English—and he seemed to like it; but on the subject of religion he spoke never one word. Only once can I remember that he said he thought la Mignonne was like her mother—her poor mother, he said, who was

then in heaven. And that was all. But, indeed, I always thought, that had not his look been so sad, so careworn, she was a very picture of him."

"She is very like," said Mr. Vincent thoughtfully. "I can trace him in every look and action. It is a sweet face. But there was one thing I wished to ask you—you heard no particulars concerning Mr. Mignon's death?"

Madame Boucher shook her head.

"But few," she said. "He arrived late at the appartements, after his journey to Paris, and he retired to his room. He was not well, he said, and did not require supper. And in the morning they found him quite dead. He had no friends near him—none at all. His portmanteau was sent to us, and that was all. We wrote back, but could obtain no answer; and when friends of mine at Paris inquired—oh, very soon!—they found it even as you say—that the appartements had passed into other people's hands. I would not ever breathe to la Mignonne the suspicions which oppress me. For surely he must have had more with him than the only one portmanteau which they sent us."

"You think his things were stolen?" said Mr. Vincent. "I have often feared the same. And yet, if that were the case, why should they not have taken

everything? That would surely have been safer for themselves than sending part to you."

"Indeed, Monsieur, the same reasoning has occurred to me. And I know poor M. Mignon often travelled with but little luggage, leaving a box or two at a station, which he would afterwards call for. But that no money—not one sou—was sent, I could think this were the case. And then the luggage would be but simply lost, because uncalled for. But to have no money—that seems indeed impossible."

"It does, certainly," said Mr. Vincent gravely.

"And yet to all inquiries that were made, we could but hear that the former owners of the appartements were so steady, so honest, I could scarcely find it in my heart to suspect such people," said Madame, sighing. "It is perplexing. We had nothing of value come to us. There was a handsome desk, indeed, which M. Mignon took always about with him, but there was little in it beyond a few old letters. And the portmanteau contained clothes, but nothing else,—no purse, no pocket-book, no money. But whether he had them with him, and they were stolen; or whether he left them somewhere else; or whether he had lost some of his things; or whether, if they were stolen, it was by the owner of the apparte-

ments or by some lodger,—that we may never know. There was a doctor and a pasteur both called quickly in, and we had letters from them—not at first, but when inquiries were made. Yet I always feel that the things could, indeed, without difficulty, have been taken when first the poor Monsieur was found to be gone, and before it was known."

"It was possible," said Mr. Vincent sighing. "But, as you say, we are never likely to know more. For the poor child's sake, I should have been glad to have known his last wishes. The mere loss of a few pounds' worth of property is of less importance. He had only a life-annuity—just sufficient, I suppose, for his expenses—and could not have left much to her. But here she comes," as Ina re-entered the room, apologizing for having been so long.

"I shall bring her back to you, Madame, in the course of an hour or two," Mr. Vincent remarked, on taking leave. "I do not intend to separate her from you, more than is necessary, in the next few days. She will wish to see as much as possible of her friends before leaving,—but we must not continue entire strangers to one another."

They turned their steps towards the Boulevards, not talking much by the way. Once or twice Ina looked shyly up into her uncle's face, which wore a serious

and even sorrowful expression. Presently he looked down in return, and encountered her inquiring eyes.

"You are having a dull walk after all, my dear," he said, rousing himself, and speaking with a smile; "but I was thinking about you."

Ina could have returned the compliment, had she felt sufficiently at her ease.

"Have you had a happy home, Ina, with Madame Boucher?"

"Oh, very happy!" and her eyes glistened. "Very very happy! I think as happy as a school *can* be."

"But you think a home may be happier?"

"I have always fancied so," returned Ina gravely. "Am I wrong, uncle?"

"I hope not. It ought to be so. I trust you will find your future home a very happy one."

"Will you tell me more about it, please?" said Ina. "I think you spoke of—of—was Antonia the name?"

"Yes. I ought to have told you about your cousins before. She is my only girl, and she was fifteen last March."

"My age!" said Ina, in a tone of glad surprise. "And there are some boys, too, are there not?"

"Yes, three—Aubrey, Cyril, and Guy. They

are good steady kind-hearted fellows,—very ready to welcome home a new sister. I am sure you will get on with them."

"I hope so," said Ina gravely. "I know very little about boys."

"You will soon learn more. My mother also lives with us. You must be another little granddaughter to her, Ina."

"I shall like it," said Ina timidly, yet smiling,—"if she will let me. And a sister to Antonia."

"I should wish you to be so. I hope you will do my poor Annie a great deal of good."

"Is she ill?" Ina asked.

"Her health has long been delicate. A year ago," and his voice grew low and mournful, "she was as bright and strong and well as you are, Ina. Then there came a fever. Annie and her mother were taken ill——"

He paused, and Ina looked up, with a world of earnest comprehensive sympathy illumining her face.

"Oh, uncle! I know it, and I am so very sorry. Poor Antonia!"

"She has never recovered her health or spirits since then," said Mr. Vincent. "Poor child! her mother was everything to her. If you can in any

way cheer her up, Ina, I shall, indeed, be grateful to you."

"I will try," said Ina quietly, but with a depth of resolution in her tone. "I will do all I can, uncle."

"I hope you will succeed, dear." Then in a more cheerful manner he added, "I shall like to introduce you to England."

"Oh, I have so longed to see it," said Ina earnestly. "I never could feel that Brussels was really my home, much as I love it."

"I hope you will soon learn to love Rockstone Leigh more. I expect to find you a thorough little Englishwoman. Your accent is not in the slightest degree foreign."

"No, Madame has always taken care that I should have plenty of English talking. There is an English teacher, Miss Andrews, and there are always two or three English girls, and I never speak to them in French. Uncle, will you stay on the Boulevards, or shall I take you to the Grande Place? I think you would like to see that."

He was very willing to go wherever she chose to lead him; but though interested in the sight of Brussels, he was yet more interested in the bright fresh intelligent mind of his newly-discovered niece.

CHAPTER IV.

"I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,
And to wipe the weeping eyes,
And a heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathize."

A. L. WARING.

"WE are moving at last, Mignonette. Two hours more, and I hope you will be in England. I am sorry the haze prevents your seeing the cliffs of Dover. But never mind, you have not much longer to wait."

"And are we really off?" asked Ina, as she glanced over the side of the steamer at the bubbling frothy masses of snow-white foam that had begun to rush from beneath the red paddle-wheel. "Good-bye to dear old Brussels!"

"Don't you feel somewhat inclined, Mignonette, to set up Mary Queen of Scots' melancholy ditty on leaving France?"

"No, indeed, uncle," replied Ina smiling. "I should not think of such a thing,—not even about leaving Brussels, though I am very very sorry to part with dear Madame."

"You must persuade her to come to England some day, and pay us a visit. I am glad we have such a calm day for crossing. Hardly any one can feel ill, I should imagine."

Apparently no one did, except three or four ladies and gentlemen, who wisely made their way into the cabins, and did not thence emerge until the conclusion of the trip. Ina enjoyed it all extremely; more especially when she began to distinguish a white line in the distance, which she guessed at once to be "Dover Cliffs."

Mr. Vincent did not press her to enter into conversation. She said very little, but sat with clasped hands and changeful colour, gazing steadily in the direction of the white line, and absorbed in her own thoughts. He could not doubt that they were pleasant ones—not even when he saw her lip trembling and her eyes filling—so intent and eager was her expression. Presently, with a deep-drawn sigh, she glanced at him, and he smiled kindly.

"You like this, Mignonette?"

"Oh! I have longed for years to see England."

"You are not disappointed now that your wish is fulfilled?"

"Disappointed! Oh, no, uncle. How could I be?"

"Sometimes the reality falls short of the imaginings. But I do not wonder that you are pleased. You cannot love and admire the 'white cliffs of Albion' more than I do myself."

She gave him one of her bright satisfied smiles, as if she had found a fresh bond of union between herself and her new uncle,—new, but already very dear to her.

"I loved them long before I saw them," she said. "But I am very very glad I have seen them at last. Shall we soon land, uncle?"

"Very soon now. You are impatient to feel as well as to see England!"

Ina laughed and blushed. "It seems so strange that I should never have been in my own country," she said.

As they drew nearer she again became silent and watchful. Then came the bustle of landing, the confusion of passengers rushing to and fro with their luggage, and the incursion of Custom-house officers. Through it all Ina preserved her usual quiet self-possession, remaining in the spot where her uncle had left her, until he came to take her to shore. She

clung then to his arm, and looked pale, but it was from the excitement of her first landing in England, not from any fear of the crowd.

Mr. Vincent conducted her along the pier to the land. They were proceeding straight to Rockstone Leigh, without waiting to sleep by the way, having spent the previous night at Calais. There was little leisure for talking until they were on the platform of the station. Then Mr. Vincent made Ina sit down on a bench, to await the time of starting, and smilingly asked her how she felt.

"I can hardly believe it is all true," Ina answered. "It seems so strange, uncle."

"Disagreeably strange, Mignonette?"

"Oh, no; you know what I mean. It bewilders me so to hear the cabmen and porters and every one talking English."

"You will soon grow used to that. My dear, what a little cold hand! Are you tired?"

"Oh, no, not at all," said Ina, her colour coming back in good earnest. "Only so glad."

"Glad to be in your own country at last! Is that it? I don't wonder, Mignonette. I dare say you have often imagined such a time as this?"

"Very often. I used to dream about it," she said in a low voice.

"The boys will be pleased to find that they have a really *English* cousin, and not a French one as they feared," said Mr. Vincent. "I have told them nothing about you—only that they are to take you for their sister, and that they may find out what you are for themselves."

A slight shadow came over Ina's face.

"I do hope I shall not disappoint them all," she said. "I am so afraid they will expect something different."

"Let them expect what they like. You need not be afraid. But we must not delay any longer taking our seats. The train will start directly."

Several hours of railway journey still lay before them; but though not usually fond of travelling, Mr. Vincent was so interested in Ina's enjoyment that he scarcely knew how time went. They had a compartment to themselves for a considerable distance, and even when not alone they kept up an almost unbroken stream of conversation—chiefly concerning the country through which they were passing. Not till they drew near the conclusion of their journey did Ina's spirits begin to flag, and an anxious look to come into her face. By the time the train stopped at the station nearest to Rockstone Leigh, she was quite grave and silent, and all through the long hour's drive

in the coach she hardly spoke a word. Once or twice Mr. Vincent gave her a cheerful encouraging smile, but he would not tease her with questions or remarks.

The "coach" which twice a day drove to and from the station, only brought them as far as a certain small inn in the town. There Mr. Vincent procured a fly for the remainder of the way. It was a very pretty though somewhat rough and steep road that wound up the hill to Rockstone Lodge. Ina's face brightened again, and a low exclamation of delight broke from her, at the sight of the wide blue sea, gleaming brightly through the early spring-green of the trees that lined the road.

"Ah, this is a view worth seeing—and it is better still higher up," Mr. Vincent remarked. "You have not much to boast of in the way of scenery at Brussels."

"Oh, no, and I do so love it," said Ina. "Is not the sea lovely? Can you see it from your house?"

"Yes, it is a more extended view than you have here. Look through the window, Ina—do you see a reddish curious-looking house above us?"

"Is that Rockstone?" asked Ina. "Oh, I think it is very pretty."

"It is quaint and picturesque, at all events."

Ina again looked up, but a turn in the road had hidden it from view.

"Uncle, have you always lived there?"

"For many years, dear. Since Cyril was a baby."

"And were you at Rockstone Leigh before then?"

"Not living here. We used to come every summer for a few weeks. But see—here is Guy."

A merry-looking boy came bounding down the road to meet them, nodding and smiling at Ina. He sprang upon the step of the carriage, holding on with one hand, and putting the other through the window to his cousin.

"How do you do? I am very glad to see you. Annie's growing quite impatient."

"So am I," said Ina warmly. "I long to see her. Are we near the house?"

"It's just round the corner. There's the garden-gate."

He stepped to the ground, and swung it open. They drove in upon the upper terrace, where a carriage-road led to the front door, flanked on each side by a narrow strip of grass, upon which stood numerous pots of geraniums and other plants, arranged in an orderly row. There were no beds on this terrace. The one below, which was larger, had

been turned into a flower-garden—the one below that, devoted to fruit and vegetables.

Ina saw nothing of this. She felt in a dream, and was full of an undefinable dread lest her new relations should be disappointed in her. Even Guy's cordial welcome had failed to drive it away. Mr. Vincent stepped out, helped her to the ground, desired Guy to assist Ralph and the cabman with the luggage, and led her into the drawing-room, gently pressing her cold trembling fingers between his own.

A fine handsome youth, whom she guessed at once to be Aubrey, was the first to shake hands. Then she was conducted to an arm-chair, where sat a grave stately lady of advanced age, from whom she received a slight kiss, bestowed with no great warmth of manner. Then a quiet-looking boy, hardly taller than Guy, greeted her kindly though silently, and lastly she found herself seated on the sofa, beside a slender languid-looking girl, who kissed her repeatedly and retained her hand affectionately.

"The child looks tired with her journey," were the first words that struck on her ear, carrying sense with them. "I told you, Horace, that you had better have stayed a night at Dover."

"But after spending one at Calais we felt too impatient to reach home, mother, to bear any more

delay," said Mr. Vincent smiling. "Mignonette quite agreed with me."

"Do you like that name?" Antonia asked. "Or shall we call you Ina?"

"I should like Mignonette best," said Ina, with a faltering voice and a forlorn feeling caused by the coldness of Lady Isabelle's reception.

"Of course you would," said Guy heartily. "It is more home-like, isn't it?"

"You would prefer to go to your own room perhaps, Ina," said Lady Isabelle. "Guy, will you ring the bell, and Benson shall show your cousin the way."

"No, I will go," said Antonia, rising, much to her grandmother's surprise. "Come, dear, with me."

The two girls went out arm-in-arm, and Mr. Vincent glanced at Lady Isabelle with a smile.

"A good effect already," he said. "It will do that poor child worlds of good to have such a sweet bright creature with her."

"You like her, papa?" said two or three voices—Aubrey adding, "You said so little in your letters, that we were afraid you were disappointed."

"I told her in joke that I meant to give you all a grand account of your new cousin, and she begged me so earnestly to say nothing at all, lest you should

be disappointed when you saw her, that I was obliged to consent. What do you say, now you have seen her?"

"She's a perfect beauty," said Guy enthusiastically. "Such splendid hair and lovely complexion."

"It is a very sweet expression," remarked Aubrey. "Poor child! she looks sadly afraid of us all. But did you say she was as old as Annie? She is nearly half a head shorter."

"And twice as womanly," said Mr. Vincent. "I do not mean that she is unchildlike. She enjoys everything like a child, and appreciates like a woman. A more lovable character I never saw. She is shy this evening, and you do not see her to advantage."

"You told me in your letter, Horace, that you had written to Mr. Percival on the subject of her schooling," interposed Lady Isabelle. "Have you received an answer yet?"

"Yes,—I will show it to you when it is unpacked. He speaks most warmly of Ina, and of the pleasure it gives him to hear she has found her relations. But he utterly refuses to take back anything that he has spent upon her education. I have induced Madame Boucher to allow me to repay a portion of what she has expended on dress and extras,—but it is evident

that she is not particularly well off, while Mr. Percival must be comparatively a wealthy man."

"You surely will not like to remain indebted to a stranger—or, at least, what people would consider indebted?" said Lady Isabelle.

"I shall write again, but I should be sorry to annoy or pain him after all his kindness. You will see from his letter that I could not really insist upon it without doing so. And, indeed, the repayment of seven years' school expenses at once, or even by instalments, would be a heavy pull upon me just now, mother," he added, in a lower tone.

Lady Isabelle was silenced, but she certainly did not look particularly pleased.

Meanwhile the two girls had gone upstairs together. Ina noticed in a moment her companion's feeble steps, and checking her own speed, she said anxiously, "Are you no better yet? I am so sorry you are not well, Antonia."

"I am not ill—only weak, and tired of everything," said Antonia dejectedly. "But it will be nice to have you here. I do hope you will be happy, and not want to go away in three months. This is your room. It is just close to mine."

"It is a very pretty room," said Ina, throwing off her hat, and gazing out of the window. "This is

the side of the house, I suppose. But I can see a little of the sea."

"Yes, I know you can," Antonia replied. She had sunk into the white easy-chair, and Ina came quickly to her side, looking distressed.

"You ought not to have come upstairs with me. Oh, I am so sorry!"

"Grandmamma says it is good for me to go about," replied Antonia, resting her cheek on her hand. "It hasn't hurt me, dear. The doctor too says that I might do more if I would try. But I can't—I don't care to do anything."

Accustomed as she was to having such remarks suppressed and checked, and any allusion to the subject of her loss put aside, she was not prepared to see her cousin's eyes fill with tears, and to feel her soft cheek laid against her own, with a tender—"Dear, dear Antonia! I am so *very* sorry for you. I know it must be so hard to bear."

"It isn't laziness, as grandmamma seems to think," said Antonia in a choked voice, yet wonderfully soothed by the exceeding sympathy of those few words. The weary feeling that no one understood or felt with her was for the first time reached, and though her tears fell, they were gentle healing tears.

"I don't think she *can* really think so," said Ina

softly. "She only wants you to do what is good for you. But perhaps you will feel stronger by-and-by. Uncle says we are to be sisters, and do everything together. You know we are just the same age—only one week between our birthdays."

"I did not know that. Then you are really just my age," said Antonia, looking interested.

"Just exactly," repeated Ina, her voice gradually becoming more cheerful. "It will be so nice—almost like having a twin sister."

Antonia's large heavy brown eyes watched her in silence for a minute.

"Are you not sorry to leave all your friends, Ina —Mignonette, I mean?" she asked.

"Very sorry," said Ina, and for a moment her lip quivered painfully. "Please don't ask me about it to-night. I shall be able to talk in a day or two. Madame has been so much more to me than any mere governess."

"We will try to make you happy here—indeed we will," said Antonia, sitting up in her chair, and feeling as if she already loved and dreaded to lose that fair delicately-tinted face, with its loving lovely expression, and frame of golden-brown hair. "Indeed we will," she repeated.

Ina answered by a warm though silent embrace,

and then, rising to her feet, she began taking off her travelling things. Benson came in, and with her help a small box was soon unpacked. By the time the dinner-bell sounded, Ina was arrayed in a simple light muslin dress, with her soft curls in glossy order.

More than one admiring glance fell on her, as she entered the room where the family was assembled. Antonia and Guy could hardly be considered past the usual schoolroom age, but Mr. Vincent was not fond of separate tables, and so soon as the children could leave the nursery they had always dined with their parents. Indeed, as Antonia had never had a governess, but had always studied with her mother, it could scarcely have been otherwise.

There was one person present at dinner who has not yet been introduced to the reader, and this was the boys' tutor, Mr. Davies. He did not sleep in the house, but he was at Rockstone immediately after breakfast, and was frequently detained till after dinner, if not till after tea. A quiet little man in appearance, decidedly under the common height, and fully conscious of his own insignificance, his greatest fear appeared to be that of finding himself in the way. When he crossed the room it was with a shy soft tread, that seemed to indicate a fear of disturbing

those present by the slightest sound of a footfall. When he sat down he lowered himself gently into his chair, as if dreading to cause the slightest vibration by too rapid a movement. And when he ate, it was in a hurried timid manner, that showed his alarm at the thought of keeping any one waiting.

Yet he was a man of great and versatile talents—a "perfect compendium of knowledge," as Aubrey termed him. There was scarcely a book which he had not read, scarcely an accomplishment in which he did not excel, scarcely a subject on which he could not converse,—and converse, when fairly aroused, with energy and eloquence. The only difficulty was to rouse him out of his modest shyness. The boys had never advanced so fast in their studies, as during the four years that they had passed under his tuition. And though they were quite at their ease with him, often laughing at him and teasing him in a good-tempered boyish fashion, yet there was no one, with the exception of their father, whom they more truly loved and respected.

Ina, with her intuitive insight into character, took a fancy to him at once, and delighted him, in her turn, with the intelligence and clearness of thought which she unconsciously displayed, during the conversation that took place at dinner. She already began to feel at

home, and among friends. Her uncle was as warm and fatherly as possible, the boys attentive and admiring, Mr. Davies no less so, Antonia exceedingly affectionate. Lady Isabelle alone remained cold and silent. Many times Ina's eyes strayed in her direction, and each time a cloud passed visibly over the brightness of her face.

This could not, however, last long with so open and loving a nature as Ina's. Bed-time came, and Antonia had already left the room, being obliged always to retire early. The boys were preparing their lessons elsewhere. Mr. Vincent advised Ina to think of following her cousin upstairs, as she was tired with her journey. Ina was far from unwilling. She rose at once, gave and received a hearty good-night kiss from him, and then went to Lady Isabelle.

"Good-night, Ina," was all she received from this quarter, and Lady Isabelle did not even pause in her knitting, though she just touched her lips to Ina's cheek. Ina was not satisfied, and she knelt down by the table, looking up into the handsome face above her with a pleading sweetness that nearly overcame Mr. Vincent, who stood near.

"Please will you tell me?" she said. "*May* I call you grandmamma? May I be your grandchild, like Annie?"

Thus assailed, what could Lady Isabelle say? She looked down at the kneeling childish figure and the upturned face, with its winning grey eyes, and a most unexpected mist came over her own vision, causing her to remove her glasses, but without avail.

"Call me anything you like, my dear," she said in a would-be indifferent manner.

"Do you mind? It would be so nice to have a grandmamma!" and great drops rose in those soft eyes. "Only I won't if you would rather not."

Lady Isabelle bent suddenly down, and kissed her kindly.

"I should like it, my dear," she said. "You shall be as much my grandchild as it is possible for you to be. You are a good child. Now run to bed."

For a moment the fair head drooped lower, and Ina's lips touched her hand. Then rising to her feet she hurried away, with one glance of silent gratitude.

CHAPTER V.

"The dread commotion
Of breakers on a rocky shore,
Where the winds rage o'er the waves,
And ocean to the tempest raves."

SOUTHEY.

"Th' afflicted deeps tumultuous mix and roar,
The waves behind impel the waves before,
Wide rolling, foaming high, and tumbling to the shore."

POPE'S HOMER.

"MIGNONETTE! Where's Mignonette? Where's la Mignonne? I say, Mignonette, there's the jolliest most glorious sea going! You really must come down to the shore and see it!" shouted Guy one afternoon, rushing into the house, about three weeks after Ina's first arrival. She had by this time fully settled into her place in the house, and proved herself an indispensable adjunct whenever anything was "going," as Guy called it.

Ina came out of the drawing-room with her finger on her lips.

"Hush! there are visitors, Guy. Were you calling me?"

"You must come to the shore," repeated Guy. "The sea is splendid."

"I saw from the window that it was rough," said Ina. "I should like very much indeed to come, if I am not wanted here."

"Couldn't you persuade Annie to come too? She hasn't been out to-day, and she might drive up again."

"I'll try," said Ina smiling, for she was now invariably made the medium of attempts upon Antonia.

"Oh, you must. She ought to come. Aubrey's on the shore, and so is Marcus, for a wonder. Who's here?"

"Mrs. Halifax and Miss Halifax. Stay a moment, Guy, will you? I will be as quick as possible."

"I shall wait in the garden till you come. There's no hurry,"—and Guy walked off, while Ina returned to the drawing-room. Mrs. Halifax was the wife of the doctor,—a lady of unusual height, the effect of which was increased by the peculiar limpness of her dress, which, as Guy said, "always flapped about her in loose folds." However, the face that surmounted her tall figure was not unpleasing,

though somewhat harsh in outline, and dark in colouring. She had two daughters, the youngest still at school, and two sons, the eldest a young man studying for his father's profession, and the youngest, Gordon, Guy's friend already mentioned. Josephine, the eldest girl, who accompanied her mother, was not remarkable for good looks, but she had a fine sensible intellectual head, and much quiet decision of manner.

Antonia was talking to her, looking indeed still very thin and pale, but with altogether much more animation of manner than she had worn for months before Ina's arrival.

"Do you want anything, my dear?" asked Lady Isabelle, seeing the latter stand patiently by her side.

"Only to know if I may go down on the shore with Guy, grandmamma. If Miss Halifax will not think me rude to leave her,—but I have never seen a rough sea yet. And I want Annie to come with me."

Lady Isabelle had hesitated at first, but the last sentence decided her.

"I am sure Josephine will excuse you both," she said, and Josephine replied quickly—

"Pray don't wait on my account. I only wish I could spare time to come with you. But don't call me Miss Halifax any longer, Ina."

"Josephine, then," with a bright smile. "And Annie darling, you will come with me?"

"I couldn't, dear," said Antonia quietly.

"Oh, but indeed I think you could," returned Ina eagerly, hanging over Antonia's chair. "Not by the short cut through the garden, but a little way down the road, and then by the small lane. Please come, Annie. You haven't had your drive to-day, and the moment you are tired Guy will call a carriage to the shore, to bring you up again."

Not for her own pleasure, but because like every one else she found it impossible to resist those pleading eyes, Antonia yielded.

"Well, I'll try," she said meekly, and with a sigh.

"Don't move, I'll bring your things down to you," said Ina, but Antonia followed her out of the room, with the words—

"I shall only be in your way, Mignonette. You had much better leave me. I wish you would."

"If you don't go I shan't either," returned Ina, slipping her arm round her cousin, and making her sit down in one of the low wicker arm-chairs that stood in the hall. "It isn't that I want to tease you, Annie dear, but I know it is best for you."

"I dare say it is," said Antonia wearily. "I don't know. I don't feel as if I ever wanted to go on the shore again. I haven't been since——"

"Since dear aunt was with you," Ina said tenderly, for she never could follow the family plan of suppressing the subject. "But, Annie darling, *she* would not like you to keep back from everything that reminds you of her. She would like you to do whatever uncle and grandmamma wish."

A hard truth, though spoken in gentle loving tones, and a slight sob escaped Antonia.

"Oh, Ina, it is very easy to talk. You don't know what it is to feel as I do."

"I think I know how you feel—as much as any one can know who has not gone through just the same. And, Annie dear, you would not like to do what is wrong. It would not be right to spend a lifetime in grieving. And it makes uncle so unhappy to see you like this."

"I did not think he understood," Antonia said in a low tone.

"He does—they all do. He is always watching you, Annie, and sometimes he looks so sad and disappointed. Won't you come on the shore to-day, to please him,—and try not to think about the last time you were there?"

"I can't help it."

"But won't you be brave and *try?*" Ina urged, pressing Antonia's hand to her lips. "Because we do all so long to see you stronger and brighter. And, indeed, I think that if you would only face it—would only not mind the pain at first—you would soon find it easier. And, Annie darling, you will be helped," she added softly. "I will pray that you may have strength. I am sure you will, for you are not going to do it for your own sake, but for uncle's, and grandmamma's, and the boys'."

For a minute Antonia laid her head on her cousin's shoulder, and cried very bitterly, though silently. Then she dashed away her tears, and stood up.

"I will try, Mignonette. I am afraid I have been sadly selfish and cowardly for a long while, but I will try not to be so any more. Would you mind getting my hat, as I am to walk so far?"

Ina flew willingly upstairs. In two minutes she returned, equipped for her walk, and carrying Antonia's hat and jacket. These were soon on, and in another five minutes they were walking slowly down the hill with Guy, who had waited for them in the garden.

"Oh, how lovely the sea looks!" Ina exclaimed.

"I do love to see the water through these trees. It seems quite covered with breakers."

"Sea-horses," said Guy.

"Oh, yes, of course. I might have remembered the name. But I have never seen them before. The sea has been so smooth since I came. I must write a long description of this to Madame."

"You write to her in French, don't you?" asked Antonia, who was leaning on her arm, while Guy restrained his high spirits to walk steadily along, and support his sister's languid steps on the other side.

"Always," said Ina. "But I am beginning now to *think* in English, do you know, Annie? I could not do it abroad, though I used to try."

"I shall always have an immense admiration of Madame for bringing you up such a thorough English girl," remarked Guy.

"She promised dear papa that she would," replied Ina gravely. "All the English girls were allowed to talk English to me, though they had to talk French to one another and to every one else. I always read my Bible in English, and went to the English church. Madame said there was not the least fear of my not knowing French."

"I should think not," said Guy decidedly.

"Are Aubrey and Cyril on the shore?" asked Ina after a pause.

"Aubrey is. Cyril I haven't seen. Grandmamma was annoyed with him yesterday evening, so I suppose he is keeping out of the way to-day in consequence."

"She so often is!" escaped Ina's lips, and then she checked herself. "I mean—she seems——"

"You needn't soften your words, Mignonette," said Guy laughing. "Granny is as fond as she can be of all of us, but Aubrey is her especial darling—Aubrey and Annie, that is—and poor Cyril is often in her bad graces."

Ina could not deny this, but she looked puzzled.

"I can't understand it," she said. "I think he is so good and quiet and gentle. I don't feel as if I knew Cyril half so well as you and Aubrey, because he so seldom talks, but I can't help liking him."

"And you have seen grandmamma put on her cold manner to him," said Guy. "Do you mean to say you don't know the reason, Mignonette?"

Ina shook her head. "I don't think I do," she said. "Once or twice I thought—but it must have been fancy——"

"Thought what?" asked Antonia, rousing herself to attend to what they were saying.

"Only about Cyril. It wasn't my business, of course, but I couldn't help seeing it. Don't tell him what I say, please, Guy. The first time was a week ago—quite late in the evening. Grandmamma wanted some old book from the garret bookcase, and she thought you were in the room, so she spoke, and asked you to get it for her, and then found it was Cyril. I thought he would go at once, but he sat still, and turned quite pale; and when grandmamma said, 'I wish you would get it, Cyril,' he only said, 'I'll ring the bell for Benson, grandmamma.' Grandmamma looked displeased, and said quite sharply, 'Really, Cyril, I have no patience with you. I wonder how much longer you mean to go on in this way.' I offered to go, but she said I did not know the book, and she rang herself for Benson,—but Cyril looked very unhappy, and I saw that his hand was quite shaking."

"Poor fellow!" said Guy. "What was the second thing, Mignonette? You need not mind telling us. We wouldn't breathe a word to Cyril that could hurt him."

"The second time was yesterday evening," said Ina. "You know we were playing croquet on the back lawn, and Conrad had thrown one of the balls into the bushes, and would not fetch it out. After-

wards we forgot all about it. You and Cyril brought in the croquet, you know, and left them lying in the hall. And when Mr. Davies was just going away after tea, grandmamma came into the hall, and said she saw there were only seven balls. We remembered then the ball in the bushes, and grandmamma wanted Cyril to go and look for it at once—at least, *feel* for it,—but Cyril flushed up red, and then turned quite white, as he had done the time before, and did not move. Mr. Davies said he would go with him, and they went together, without any more being said, but I saw that grandmamma hardly spoke to him again before bed-time, and to-day she did not seem pleased."

"I don't wonder you are puzzled," said Antonia. "But indeed, Mignonette, it is not cowardice—not naturally, I mean. It was the fault of a servant."

"I don't understand," said Ina. "Do you mean—was he afraid?"

"He was afraid to go alone into the dark," said Antonia. "It was the same in the garrets, for a candle there lights it up very little, you know. I don't think he can help it. I am sure he sometimes tries not to give way. You ought to know about it, or you might be saying things to pain him. We don't often hear or see anything of the kind now,—

it is light till so late in the evening. But in winter we are always having little scenes."

"Did you say it was the fault of a servant?" asked Ina.

"Yes, of a nursemaid," said Antonia. "It was when he was quite a little fellow, and he slept with her. She used to frighten him into doing whatever she liked, by telling him dreadful stories. Sometimes she would dress up figures, and tell him that they would eat him if he called out or moved. He was always a delicate timid little fellow, and he used to lie and shake with terror, and yet never dare to tell any one of what she did. Neither dear mamma nor nurse had an idea of such a thing, for she always seemed pleasant and helpful, and she had taught poor little Cyril that she could protect him from everything, so that he always used to cling to her. But they never could understand why he always looked so pale and thin and frightened. Guy, you can tell the rest. I can't talk so much while I am walking."

"It went on like that for months," said Guy, in continuation. "But they found it out at last by accident. She had slipped out of the house quite late at night to see a friend, and left Cyril lying in the dark, with only just a glimmer of light to show her dress hung up at the foot of the bed. It wasn't till

long afterwards that he dared to tell what she had said to him,—that there was a man behind the dress who would kill him if he made a noise. But a little later every one in the house was startled by a frightful shriek, and when they reached his room they found him screaming dreadfully, and quite delirious. For weeks they thought he would have died or lost his mind, and he has never got over his terror of the dark since. He never speaks of it, and he is afraid of nothing else, but the moment he is alone, and it begins to get dusk, he turns quite cold and trembles all over."

"Oh, I don't wonder," said Ina compassionately. "Poor Cyril! But what was done to the servant?"

"Oh, she confessed what she had done, and was dismissed without a character. It was far better than she deserved. She has injured Cyril for life."

"But how can grandmamma be displeased with him for it?" asked Ina.

"She thinks he ought to get over it. He is just sixteen, you know, though he doesn't look so much, and it will be a horrid thing for him when he is a man, if he can't be in the dark by himself. But I don't think finding fault is the way to help him. At one time she used to try and force him to do things—such as going into the garden or about the house

alone after dark,—but it made him so ill that mamma—I mean, papa—would not let it go on, and now he always does what he likes. Aubrey hates weakness as much as grandmamma does, but he is always kind to poor Cyril."

"Oh, I don't wonder," said Ina again. "It is so very sad for Cyril,—so much worse for a boy than a girl."

"But here we are at the shore," said Guy, "and there's Aubrey coming to meet us. He doesn't expect to see Annie."

Antonia could not help smiling at his start of pleased surprise. His second glance was one of gratitude to Ina, for he knew well who had worked the wonder.

"We've brought her down, you see," Guy complacently observed. "Will you take her arm on the shingles, Aubrey? You'll help her more than I can, and there's Gordon beckoning to me."

Aubrey laughed and released him.

"I can guess who brought you, Annie," he said, looking affectionately at her. "I am so glad you have come."

Antonia smiled a little, though her eyes were somewhat dim, and she had to struggle with the tears that threatened to rise at the thought of her last walk on the beach.

"Oh, what waves!" Ina said with almost a gasp, and by the time Antonia was conducted down the beach, and seated comfortably on the shingles, she was conscious of nothing else. She had pulled off her hat in her excitement, and her face in its rapt enjoyment was worth looking at. She stood with clasped hands, and changeful colour, the strong gusty breeze blowing about her dress, fluttering her ribbons, and flinging to and fro her long curls. Otherwise she remained silent and motionless, with her eyes fixed on the heaving water—earnestly, yet flashing with suppressed eagerness.

In truth it was a sight that few would willingly have missed. Each mighty wave swept steadily up, gathering height and speed as it neared the shore. There for an instant it seemed to pause—a wide massive wall of transparent green. Then curling gracefully over, it fell with a heavy crash and a deep sullen boom upon the beach, while masses of rich white foam rushed forward, then poured like a torrent back, crunching and hustling the pebbles in their retreat, and partially checking the career of fresh masses of snowy foam, launched forward by the next advancing billow. It was a wonderful picture—that sea of boiling conflicting waves, rising and falling incessantly. Near the shore they were turbid and

brown, from the stirred-up sand, but farther out they shone a pure rich green, shaded here and there with dark picturesque lines, as light clouds passed over the face of the sun. And many a weed, uptorn from its ocean bed, was tossed roughly hither and thither, at length to be flung ruthlessly ashore. White sea-gulls flashed to and fro over the troubled waters, but not a mast or sail was within view.

"You like this, Mignonette," said Aubrey at length.

She turned her glowing face towards him.

"Oh, so much!—more than I can tell! I never imagined anything so beautiful. Annie, it must do you good."

Antonia's smile satisfied her, and at that moment Marcus Winnington, the young rector, came up.

"My new cousin enjoying the sea!" he said, as he gave her his hand, after a few words expressive of his pleasure at seeing Antonia on the beach. "This is a wonderful sight, is it not?"

"It is almost *too* wonderful," said Ina. "It makes one feel so small."

His eye went from her face to the dark seething waters,—"Yes," he said gravely. "I can understand your feeling. Yet, Mignonette, one human soul is worth all that wonderful expanse—all those magnifi-

cent waves. For 'the sea shall be no more,' but a soul once formed can never die."

"I know that," said Ina, her eyes glistening. "But still I cannot help feeling very very small and insignificant before such a sight as this."

"Then you only feel what we one and all are," he replied, with a kindly glance. After a pause, in a deep earnest tone, audible through all the tumult of wind and waves, he repeated slowly—"'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. 'For He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.'"

He did not conclude the passage, but Ina gave him a shy bright glance of pleasure.

"Oh, thank you—I like to be reminded of that," she said, though he could see that the thought had been already in her mind. For a time they all looked in silence, and then Ina turned to her cousin.

"Now, Annie dear, if you are tired Guy will call you a carriage."

"I am a little tired," said Antonia, but she spoke cheerfully. "You need not come with me, Mignonette. I can easily drive home alone."

"I'll go with you," said Aubrey. "Mignonette ought to enjoy this a little longer."

Ina, however, preferred to accompany Antonia, and see her safely home. Guy had disappeared with Gordon, but Aubrey soon procured a basket pony-carriage, and stepped in with the two girls. The drive was a silent one. Antonia leant back, too tired to talk, yet looking less depressed than she had long done, while Ina was still absorbed in thought over the scene she had witnessed. Aubrey found sufficient occupation in watching the varying expressions that flitted over her face, and scarcely a word was spoken till they reached home.

At the door Mr. Vincent met them. He led Antonia into the house, removed her hat with his own hands, laid her on the sofa, and told her she was a "dear good child!"

"Mignonette made me go," said Antonia, adding with a sigh—"I am glad I have been, papa. I shall not mind it so much now."

Mr. Vincent's glance at Ina fully rewarded her for the trouble she had taken—though in truth she needed no reward beyond the pleasure of success. Lady Isabelle said nothing, but that evening her manner was warmer than it had ever yet been towards her adopted grandchild. And they had reason to be grateful. There was a visible and increasing improvement in Antonia's health and spirits from that day forward.

CHAPTER VI.

"What's to be done?"
"This, and no more."
"Hah! is't then so?"
"Most certainly."
"I'll do't."
"Remember."

N. LEE.

"OH, Guy, have you brought that book that Josephine promised me? She said she would give it to you, if she saw you this afternoon."

Guy came in, looking flushed and dispirited, and flung himself down on the rug.

"Yes, here it is. I didn't go into the house, but she sent Gordon after me with it."

"Thank you very much for bringing it," said Ina gratefully, as she received the volume. "Have you had a nice long ramble this afternoon?"

"I don't know. Yes, I suppose so," said Guy moodily.

"You had better have come with Cyril and Mr. Davies and me," said Ina smiling.

"I wish I had with all my heart," muttered Guy, stretching himself. "Where are grandmamma and Annie?"

"Annie is in the arbour, working, I think. I am going out to her when I have finished copying this letter for uncle Horace. Grandmamma only went away a few minutes ago. She has been telling me something very nice."

Guy did not appear in the humour to sympathize with anything "nice," but he asked what it was.

"I'll tell you if you will come with me into the garden. Grandmamma asked me to tell Annie before any one else."

"Is it something Annie will like?"

"I hope so. I mean to *make* her like it if I can," said Ina, with a shade of doubt in her face. "There, I am doing the last line. Now I have finished. I must just put this in uncle's study, and then we'll go into the garden."

She sped away with her light quick step, and then returned, garden-hat in hand, but Guy did not seem inclined to move.

"I say, Mignonette, can't you stay a minute or two?" he asked. "There's no hurry, is there?"

"Oh, no, not in the least," said Ina, obliging as usual, though longing to go to Antonia, and she sat down on a low chair just in front of him. "What do you want, Guy?"

Guy fidgeted, raised himself on his elbow, and pushed his fingers through his hair till it stood on end.

"Why, you see, Mignonette, the truth is that I have got into a horrid scrape, and I don't see any way to get out of it again."

Ina's sympathies were roused in an instant. "I'll do anything I can to help you, Guy. Tell me what's wrong."

"I can't! That's the very thing. I mustn't tell you anything."

"But I don't see how I am to help you, unless I know a little about it," said Ina. "Why don't you go and tell uncle?"

"I've promised. If I hadn't it would be no scrape at all."

"Promised what? But I suppose I must not ask that."

"I've promised not to tell. It's something that is going to be done, and I threatened to make it known. And—and—they made me——I mean—" Guy rolled round, with his face away from those truthful

inquiring eyes, and added desperately, "The fact is they laughed me into promising to keep it a secret. And now I can't tell, and I don't feel as if I could look any one in the face."

"Oh, Guy, what a pity!" said Ina gently.

"It's a shame!" said Guy. "But I can't help it, Ina. I forget everything when I'm laughed at, though I'm ready to eat myself afterwards for being so childish and weak. It *is* weak, I know. Catch Aubrey giving way to any one because he was laughed at."

"I should not think Aubrey would," said Ina thoughtfully. "And you won't yourself another time, Guy."

"I'll try not, that's very certain. But I've said so a hundred times before. And the question is what am I to do now?"

"If I only had a little idea of what was wrong It is so difficult to advise without."

"And I can't tell you," said Guy despondently.

"Do you want money?" asked Ina suddenly. "I haven't much, Guy, but I would give you what I have."

"You would do anything for others," said Guy, sitting up and speaking huskily. "I never saw any one like you, Mignonette! But it isn't money that I

want, and you don't think I *could* take yours under any circumstances, do you?"

"I should like it," said Ina simply. "I owe you all so much. But is there nothing else I can do for you? You need not explain your secret, but just tell me what to do. So long as it is not wrong, I will trust you, and do it—blindly," she added with a smile. "I am putting myself in your hands, Guy, and putting you upon your honour."

"Don't! I shan't know what to say if you go on like that," cried Guy despairingly. "There is one thing I might ask you to do, but I can't. Oh, dear! I do feel such a wretched mean coward."

"Hadn't you better explain what I am to do, and call yourself names afterwards, Guy?" suggested Ina.

"I hate to ask it of you."

"Is it anything wrong?" asked Ina. Guy shook his head. "Or anything that will put me into danger?" Another shake. "Or anything that uncle would disapprove?"

Guy thought a minute.

"No; if he knew the reason he would be grateful to you for doing it, though he would be as disgusted with me as I am with myself."

"Oh, Guy! I never saw uncle Horace disgusted with anybody. He might be grieved."

"That's worse still. Well, if I *must* tell you! You know that we are going to tea with the Halifaxes to-morrow evening,—grandmamma, and papa, and you, and Annie, and Cyril, and I. Aubrey will be engaged elsewhere."

Ina nodded silently.

"And—and—Ina, you must promise me not to try to guess anything. If you do, I shall feel just as dishonourable as if I had broken my word."

"I'll take care," said Ina. "You can't do anything yourself, Guy, to stop these proceedings, whatever they are?"

Guy looked alarmed, and she smiled.

"You need not be afraid. You told me something was going to be done, so I call it a proceeding, but I am quite in ignorance."

"I can't do anything," said Guy mournfully. "They made me promise something before I found out what they were about, which will keep me from doing anything myself. I shouldn't mind, but for that."

"Then tell me what I can do."

"Only—will you walk home with Cyril and me, instead of driving home with grandmamma and uncle and Annie?"

"Not a very formidable request," said Ina cheer-

fully. "Oh, yes, I think I may promise, unless they should forbid it."

"You mustn't let them," said Guy eagerly. "Please make a point of it, Ina,—only don't say that I have asked you. And,—oh dear, I hate myself for having to ask you,—but if you really don't mind it, it will be *such* a comfort."

"To be sure I don't," said Ina. "Come, don't look so unhappy, Guy. What am I to do in this wonderful moonlight walk to-morrow evening?"

"That's all," said Guy, sighing deeply. "I mustn't say any more."

"I shall begin to suspect that you have laid some man-traps on the path, with the intention of catching and keeping me, if you look so very melancholy," said Ina, smiling, and extremely anxious to conceal from him her suspicion, that her presence was required to prevent the perpetration of some mischief or practical joking. She knew that both Gordon Halifax and his brother Lawrence, who was just now at home, were somewhat addicted to the latter. "If that is all you want, suppose you come out with me to Antonia, and hear my news,—not that it is anything particularly concerning you."

Guy rose mechanically and walked by her side,

inveighing against himself by the way. Ina tried to lead to another subject, but in vain.

"I don't think it does much good to talk about it so much," she said gently. "I will do what I can to help you. But calling yourself names won't make it any better, though I dare say you find it a relief."

"You don't think I ought to forget what I have done?" said Guy.

"Oh, no, I don't mean that. Only, you know as well as I do, Guy, what we ought to do when we have been led into wrong."

"Determine not to do it again? So I do, Mignonette."

"I don't mean only that. Something else comes first," Ina said softly, most careful that her tone should not, in the slightest degree, be that of teaching or preaching. She knew how jealous boys are on the subject of fault-finding, from girls of about their own age.

Guy gave her an intelligent glance.

"I see; but I didn't think of that with a thing of this kind. It seems so—not exactly small—but——"

"But nothing is too small to need forgiveness," said Ina gently. "If I have said even one hasty

word, Guy, I never feel really happy till I have confessed it, and prayed for pardon. I always like to think of something dear uncle Horace said one day, 'that no sin was too slight to require washing away in our Saviour's blood.'"

Guy did not answer. He was not a boy to find it easy to converse on serious subjects, but Ina saw by his face that her words were not thrown away, and she had far too much tact to say any more. They did not again break silence until they reached the arbour on the second terrace, where Antonia was sitting and working.

"Where have you been all this time, Mignonette?" she asked. "I expected you a long time ago. I am sure papa would not have allowed you to copy that letter for him, if he had known it would take you so long."

"Oh, it was not the letter. I finished that a good while ago, but Guy and I were talking, and that delayed me a little. How is your work getting on?"

"I have nearly finished this mat," Antonia replied, holding it out for inspection. Braiding was an occupation which she had lately been induced to undertake by Ina, and in which she was becoming interested.

"How prettily you are doing it," said Ina, sitting

down. "I like that nice little twist of the braid round the stem of the flower. It is your own idea, is it not?"

"I fancied it would be an improvement," said Antonia, looking pleased. "But I am almost tired of working now."

"Don't do it any longer then," said Ina, taking it out of her hands. "There, I have laid it as neatly as possible in the box. I am going to read to you some of my favourite parts in the 'Lady of the Lake' directly, only I have a little piece of news to tell you first."

"What news?" Antonia asked, with a manner very different to the languid inertia of a few weeks before. Delicate and easily fatigued she was still, but they no longer found it impossible to rouse her interest.

"Why, grandmamma was saying to me that the boys' holidays are nearly over, and she has been very anxious to find some one who can undertake our lessons. Our holidays ought to end at the same time as theirs. Guess who will teach us."

"I don't know," said Antonia in a faltering voice.

"No, I don't think you are likely to find out. Josephine is to come every day after breakfast, and

stay till four or half-past in the afternoon. Oh, I'm so glad it will not be a strange middle-aged governess. She will undertake all the plain things—history and geography and so on,—music and singing too. And dear kind Mr. Davies has proposed to give us occasional lessons in drawing and astronomy and composition and German, and anything else grandmamma likes,—just one hour a week of each, I believe, and we should prepare for him in the meantime. Won't it be nice, Annie? We shall do everything together. At first, of course, you must not attempt much, because it will tire you, but soon I hope you will be stronger, and then it will be delightful. I do so like the idea of learning from Mr. Davies, and I am sure Josephine will make a very pleasant governess."

Ina talked fast, to allow Antonia leisure to recover herself, and by the time her speech was ended the latter said quietly, "Yes, I think I shall like it —after a little while."

"I mean to begin talking French all lesson-time," said Ina, "so that I shall keep it up, and you will learn it without any trouble. Then we must study German together, and perhaps Italian too in a little while. I am sure we shall enjoy it."

Antonia did not contradict her, and she took up

her book. The next hour passed pleasantly with the other two, in listening to her reading, and enjoying the poetry. Ina entered so heartily into the spirit of it herself that her hearers could not but do the same.

The evening of the following day arrived, and soon after dinner Ina and the Vincents—all excepting Aubrey—went to the doctor's house. It stood lower than the church, yet slightly higher than the town itself. In the garden they were met by Cecily, Josephine's only sister, a merry girl of about fifteen or sixteen. She was a great admirer of Ina, and received her with warm caresses. Antonia's gentle indolent easily-depressed nature suited her less.

"I'm so glad you have all come," she said heartily. "Papa said you were so tired with your long walk this afternoon, Mr. Vincent, that he hardly expected to see you."

"We had a carriage for Annie, or I might not have managed it," replied Mr. Vincent, smiling. "Ah, the boys are here before us, I perceive."

"They have been with Gordon nearly half-an-hour," said Cecily, as she pushed open the drawing-room door, and conducted them in. Shakings of hands were followed by the removal of jackets and hats,—then by tea, which was handed round on the

lawn. Ina secured a seat by Josephine's side, and eagerly expressed her pleasure at the news she had heard the day before.

"I do hope you will not find me a troublesome pupil," she said. "I will work very hard, Josephine. It is so kind of you to think of such a thing."

"So kind of Mr. Vincent and Lady Isabelle to allow me to attempt it," said Josephine. "Ina, I must be very strict and particular. I have been debating with myself whether I ought to ask you to call me Miss Halifax. Do you think it would make me seem more venerable?"

"I don't wish you to seem so," said Ina, laughing. "Annie, shall we call Josephine Miss Halifax?"

"It would be impossible," was Antonia's reply. "I could never remember to do it."

"'What's in a name?'" quoted Lawrence Halifax, overhearing them. "Is Josephine considering how best to sustain her dignity?"

"She will not need to consider it," said Ina. "Annie and I shall be only too glad to do whatever she wishes."

"A consoling assurance for Josephine!" returned Lawrence, with an indolent air and amused gaze that always annoyed Ina, though she showed it only by a

certain pretty dignity of manner, peculiar to herself. "Miss Mignon, has Cecily shown you our new hive of bees yet? They are her great pets."

"Cecily told me of them," said Ina. "I have not seen them yet."

"Are you an admirer of the bee-tribe, Miss Mignon?" asked Mr. Halifax, an elderly gentleman, with somewhat dreamy hesitating manners and deliberate articulation, not calculated to prove very cheering or reassuring to his patients.

"I think I like all animals," replied Ina. "I know very little about bees."

"Ah, yes—yes, I see—yes. But Cecily will be delighted to initiate you. Bees are quite among the wonders—quite among the wonders of creation."

"And form a model for mankind," said Cecily gaily. "I always say that the fact of their having a queen-bee furnishes a most convincing argument against republicanism. Don't you agree with me, papa?"

"Possibly, my dear. Well, yes—yes, certainly. It may no doubt be taken in that way—no doubt;" and Mr. Halifax gazed meditatively towards the roof of the house.

"Do you agree too with Cecily, Miss Mignon?" asked Lawrence. "Do you consider the bees a

model for mankind? Perhaps you are not aware that the argument cuts two ways. Does it occur to you what would be the consequences to the ladies, if we followed the example of the bees in all particulars? There is a certain resemblance to North American Indian customs—which—ahem——"

"You mean that the ladies should undertake all the work, and the gentlemen remain idle," said Ina.

"Well, that certainly was my idea. Only suggested, you understand, by Cecily's remark. But no doubt you would object to that."

"Oh, no, not in the least," quietly replied Ina. "Only on one condition—that we literally follow your plan of copying the bees in *all* particulars. Of course you know that they are in the habit of regularly stinging to death all the lazy drones that they can find, before winter comes on."

Lawrence looked considerably discomfited by the burst of laughter that followed Ina's quick retort. Mr. Halifax remarked that she was not so ignorant concerning bees as she had professed to be.

"I have read about them," Ina said in explanation, and then turned her attention to Josephine, leaving Lawrence to recover his equanimity at leisure. Croquet was shortly brought out, and a game commenced on the lawn by those who cared to join.

Antonia was not strong enough to stand about, and Josephine did not feel any interest in hoops and mallets, but Cecily and Ina were pressed into the service, and between talking, laughing, and knocking about of wooden balls, the evening passed pleasantly away.

CHAPTER VII.

"But not a voice replied; no answer came from the darkness;
And when the echoes had ceased, like a sense of pain was the silence."

LONGFELLOW.

"And his heart within him fluttered,
Trembled like the leaves above him,
Like the birch-leaf palpitated."

HIAWATHA.

HALF-PAST ten o'clock came, and the fly was at the door. Mr. Vincent and Mr. Halifax handed in Lady Isabelle, while the girls were saying good-bye in the doorway. Guy gave Ina a beseeching glance, and she stepped forward.

"Uncle Horace, may I walk home with the boys instead of driving?"

Mr. Vincent looked rather surprised.

"My dear, you must be tired after standing about the whole evening over croquet."

"Oh, no, hardly at all tired," said Ina. "Indeed I would much rather walk."

"Do you want me to come and protect you?" asked Mr. Vincent, smiling. "Because, if *you* are not tired, *I* am."

"Oh, no, indeed, uncle—please don't think I could mean any such thing. Gordon is going part of the way with us, and he and Cyril and Guy are quite enough protection. Nobody is likely to carry me off."

"Nonsense, Ina," said Lady Isabelle's voice from the carriage. "Jump in, and don't ask such a silly thing. You can't possibly want more walking to-night."

"Oh, please, grandmamma," said Ina in her most beseeching tone—"Won't you let me this once?"

"Let her do as she likes, pray," said Mr. Halifax. "Miss Mignon is not likely to get into any harm—not at all likely."

"I should think not," said Ina gaily. "Cyril, you would like me to come, would you not?"

Cyril answered warmly in the affirmative, while Lady Isabelle muttered—"I dare say it is some nonsense of that boy's. I should think Guy and Gordon were companions enough, without his wanting a girl to protect him."

Ina, however, did not hear this, and she hung back, looking anxiously at her uncle.

"You are not wont to be so importunate," said Mr. Vincent, hardly able to help smiling. "I shall think the boys have been bribing you to accompany them. Mother, will you give your consent? Mignonette is such a steady lass, that if she really has a fancy for a moonlight walk by way of a change, I don't see why she should not have her wish."

"If you like," was the answer in a tone that at any other time would have made Ina at once give way. She found it rather hard now to preserve a smiling face, and Mr. Vincent stepped into the carriage, secretly somewhat perplexed by this sudden and unaccountable fit of wilfulness. Ina could see that even he was not quite pleased, and the tears rose to her eyes as they drove away. She was very quiet during the first part of her walk with the boys. Cyril was on one side of her, and Guy and Gordon on the other. Presently, however, as they began to ascend the hill, the latter two stepped behind, though still remaining close. Ina saw Cyril cast an occasional nervous glance round to see that they were near, and she remarked cheerfully—

"What lovely moonshine it is this evening!"

"Is it? I don't admire it," returned Cyril, with a slight shudder. "Not among these trees at all events."

"I think the trees only make it the more beautiful," said Ina. "Look how it shines through that cluster of dark leaves. I declare the boughs almost meet over our heads here. It will be a regular archway in a few years, if they grow much more."

"Hallo, Guy—what's that?" they heard behind them in Gordon's voice, and they turned in time to see both boys dash into the thicket and disappear—Gordon evidently pulling Guy with him, almost by main force. Cyril stood motionless, and Ina laughed, though with rather an effort, for she felt indignant.

"Very ungallant, is it not, Cyril, to leave me alone to your care?" she said. "I shall only have one knight now, instead of three. It is some mischief of Gordon's, I suppose, but we had better go on towards home at once, and they will soon overtake us."

Cyril obeyed mechanically. Ina slipped her arm in his, as if for protection,—in reality to afford protection to him.

"I am afraid uncle will think he left me in the charge of rather giddy guardians," she remarked, as they recommenced their walk up the hill. "Perhaps, though, they saw a squirrel or a rabbit, and then they will be back directly."

Cyril's answer was not very intelligible. They went on for two or three minutes, Ina chatting cheer-

fully, when Cyril suddenly stopped short, and she felt him trembling violently. "Ina, what's that?" he whispered hoarsely.

"That tree do you mean?" asked Ina. Then, as a light cloud rolled off the face of the moon, she distinctly saw a dark mysterious-looking figure, standing motionless among the trees at a short distance.

"Not a tree!—no,—don't you see?" and Cyril gasped audibly for breath. "Ina, come away."

For a moment Ina's heart beat unpleasantly fast at the thought of possible robbers or poachers. But the next moment the figure moved slowly forward, appearing to increase in height at every step, a faint blue light shone from behind it, and a suspicion of the truth flashed into her mind.

"Cyril, don't be frightened,—it is nothing," she said eagerly, taking his clammy hands between hers. "It is only some trick of the boys. Don't think about it, but come home."

But the now brightly-shining moon revealed so white and rigid a face that she was alarmed. His eyes were dilated and fixed, and it was evident that her words were unheard. The next moment she felt him sinking, and in another instant he lay at her feet. Ina bent over him, laid her hand on his brow,

spoke to him, and then sprang up, calling, with a sharp ring of terror in her voice,—

"Guy! Guy!—where are you? Oh, do not stay away any longer. Cyril has fainted. Oh, Guy! do come."

There was no answer, and she glanced in the direction of the figure that had so alarmed Cyril. The blue light was gone, and she fancied she could see something moving away. With sudden resolution she sprang a few steps up the hill.

"Guy!—is that you? Who is it?"

Silence still, and in despair Ina returned to Cyril, tears of bitter indignation at such unmanly treatment filling her eyes. She sat down on the ground, took his head upon her dress, and began rubbing one of his hands. Another long minute passed, and then Guy dashed up, pale and breathless.

"Ina, what is the matter? Has it hurt him?"

"You knew of it!" said Ina, looking up sorrowfully. "Oh, Guy!"

"I couldn't help it. Think anything you like of me, Ina,—you can't think worse than I do of myself. What is the matter?" and he looked almost as white as Cyril himself.

"He has fainted, I think," said Ina. "I can't bring him to himself. Guy, he must not stay here."

"They *must* come and help," said Guy resolutely, and he shouted, "Lawrence! Gordon!" with a vehemence that made the woods ring, and speedily caused them to appear.

"Was it their doing?" Ina asked in a low tone, as she saw them approaching.

"Of course it was. Lawrence's chiefly. All I did was to let them get me out of the way, and promise not to tell. That was bad enough," and he sighed. "Lawrence, what's to be done now?"

Lawrence produced a bottle full of water.

"Gordon fetched this," he said. "It was used at a pic-nic lately, and he saw it yesterday lying close to the spring, so he knew where to find it. Miss Mignon, I am sure you will believe that we only thought of having a little fun, and had no idea of injuring Cyril."

Ina could not excuse the fun which had no compassion on the feelings of another. She could not bear to look at Lawrence, and received the bottle in silence with an averted face. They stood watching her as she sprinkled it on Cyril's brow. With a gasp for breath he opened his eyes and glanced round, then shuddered and closed them again.

"Cyril,—you are safe!" said Ina, bending over

him, and speaking in her sweetest most reassuring tone. "Guy and I are both with you."

She dashed a little more water in his face, and he looked up a second time with a bewildered gaze. Just then, to Ina's unspeakable relief, she heard her uncle's voice at a short distance up the hill, exclaiming—

"Is Ina there? What is wrong?"

"Uncle, I am here," she called eagerly, and in another moment he stood among them. Gordon fairly decamped. Lawrence stroked his chin, and looked much less at his ease than he desired to appear. Guy remained silent and downcast.

"Has anything happened, Ina? Why have you not come home? Is Cyril ill?"

"He has fainted," said Ina. "He is better now, uncle. It was a trick of the—the——" she paused a moment, and simply added,—"You had better ask Mr. Halifax about it."

"Is this your work, Lawrence?" And quiet as the tone was, it was not one to be trifled with.

"Well,—a—it was—not exactly mine," said Lawrence, shuffling a little. "There was some talk of a dressing-up, just for amusement, and in fact I had on a long cloak,—and—a—Cyril being nervous, saw me among the trees."

"Where, no doubt, you expected him to see you," returned Mr. Vincent, with calm contempt. "Good-night, Lawrence. I do not think you can render us any further assistance."

Lawrence was glad to take his departure, which he did with somewhat undignified haste. Mr. Vincent bent over Cyril, who was now sitting up, though still weak and trembling.

"Do you think you can walk home, my boy? If you had a little water——"

Ina handed him the bottle.

"Don't cut yourself, Cyril; the neck is broken on one side."

"Where did you procure this, Ina?"

"Gordon brought it, uncle. I suppose he fetched it when he heard me call out that Cyril had fainted."

"I can walk now," said Cyril, and with the help of his father's arm he rose to his feet, and ascended the hill, though with frequent pauses. Near the house they were met by Aubrey, who had just returned home, and in the garden Lady Isabelle was waiting anxiously.

"At last!" she said, when they appeared. "What can Ina have been about?"

"It was not her fault that she is late," said Mr. Vincent gravely, as they entered the house, and Cyril

sat down on a chair. "I will tell you all in a few moments—all, at least, that I know. Guy, perhaps, may have more to say."

For he had noticed the boy's conscious dispirited look, and felt convinced that he was in a measure to blame for what had passed. Lady Isabelle was rather curious, but she no sooner heard of Cyril's faintness than she suspected the truth, and was satisfied to hear no more until he was sent to bed. Ina ran upstairs to Antonia, who had gone to her room immediately she reached home, to explain the cause of their long delay. When she returned to the drawing-room, she found Lady Isabelle, Mr. Vincent, and Aubrey discussing what had occurred, and Guy sitting with his face resting on his hands.

"Ina, it is time for you to be in bed," said Lady Isabelle as she entered.

"But before she goes we should like to hear a few more particulars," said Mr. Vincent. "Unless she is too tired to give them to us."

"Oh, no," said Ina, and she came to the chair that he placed for her by his side. "But I don't know how much you have heard."

"Tell me all that happened. I shall ask Guy for more particulars afterwards. I wish to hear your account first."

Ina gave it quietly and consecutively. Aubrey exclaimed indignantly once or twice against Lawrence, but little was said till she had finished. Then there was a moment's pause.

"Guy, have you anything to tell me?" asked his father.

Guy made a sound of assent.

"Will you tell me here or alone?"

Guy flushed, and cleared his throat.

"I don't mind, papa. They'll all hear. I knew beforehand what Lawrence and Gordon meant to do."

"How long beforehand?"

"The day before yesterday."

"And you made no effort to prevent it?"

Guy's colour became deeper.

"I don't know. I didn't do much. I know it was wrong."

"It was wrong and unmanly, Guy. I could not have believed you capable of such conduct."

The tone was sorrowful rather than displeased, and Guy's lips trembled visibly. Ina could not help interposing—

"Uncle Horace, I don't know how they made him promise, but I know he was very unhappy afterwards. He could not tell me anything, but he asked

me to walk home with them this evening, and I said I would if I could."

Mr. Vincent answered by a kiss.

"Thank you, my dear child. But for your presence Cyril might have suffered severely from this evening's work. Guy, did you never hear of such a thing as a practical joke of this kind ending either in brain fever or insanity?"

Guy could not speak, and Aubrey asked, "Did you guess why you were to walk home, Ina?"

"I don't know," said Ina rather faintly. "No, I did not really guess,—I only thought it might be a trick of some kind."

"And you were not afraid to put yourself in the way of it?"

"No, oh, no; I knew they would not do anything to me," said Ina simply. "I am very glad I was there."

"So am I," said Lady Isabelle, much to Ina's surprise.

"I should like to hear particulars, Guy," said his father gravely.

"There isn't much to tell," murmured Guy. "I don't know how it was. Lawrence and Gordon were talking and laughing about something, and I could not make out what it was. Then they said it

was a bit of fun, and would I promise to join? I promised without thinking, and then they said, that when I was walking home with Cyril, I was to run into the bushes with Gordon, as soon as he said, 'Hallo! what's that?' I began to fancy it was to frighten Cyril, and I wanted to know more, but they said they wouldn't tell me unless I promised again to keep to my word. I said that of course I would keep to my word, and I would run into the thicket with Gordon, but I should prepare Cyril beforehand, and make him come with me. And then—then they laughed at me, and they declared it wouldn't do Cyril the least harm, for Lawrence only meant to put on a long cloak, and walk out into the road, and Cyril would only be a little startled. And somehow, just for a minute, I began to think it would be fun, and they told me we shouldn't coddle Cyril, and called me his nursemaid—until at last I promised not to tell."

"Promised because you were laughed at!" Aubrey repeated very quietly, yet with a touch of scorn.

"I know it was mean and weak," said Guy. "But they told me nothing of the blue light. And it wasn't till I thought of it afterwards that I minded it so much. Papa, I am very sorry it has happened."

"So am I, Guy,—very sorry that my boy should

find it so difficult to say 'No,' when tempted to do wrong."

"Gordon Halifax is the very worst friend that Guy could possibly have," said Lady Isabelle. "He is taking after his brother in everything."

"I hope Guy will have sufficient sense to see that he is not a very desirable companion, after such behaviour as this," said Mr. Vincent quietly. "I think you had better go to bed now, Guy. To-morrow I should like to have a few words with you again on the subject."

Guy rose, but lingered.

"Papa, are you angry?" he faltered. "Will you forgive me?"

Mr. Vincent held out his hand with a kind smile.

"Fully, my boy. You have freely acknowledged your fault, and I trust it may be long before I see you act in such a manner again. Only, Guy," and he drew him nearer, speaking in a low tone, while the others were talking together, "I would have you remember that no dependence can be placed upon your own unaided resolutions. You will find them but broken reeds to lean upon. Our Saviour's strength alone is made 'perfect in weakness.'"

He shook the boy's hand kindly once more, and Guy hurried out of the room in silence.

"Poor fellow!" Mr. Vincent remarked. "I do not think he will forget this evening. It is a mercy that this foolish trick has had no worse consequences. Cyril was quite himself again, when you left him, Aubrey?"

"Entirely, papa. Only as much ashamed of himself as Guy is, for being so easily overcome when a girl could stand firm."

"Mignonette, did you not feel afraid when you saw the figure among the trees?" asked her uncle, his face relaxing as he looked at her.

"I don't think I was," said Ina. "Just at first I thought it might be a robber, and I believe I was a little frightened,—but when I saw the blue light I felt sure it was a trick."

"I suppose if it had been a robber Cyril would have proved the bravest of the two," remarked Aubrey. "Are you a coward in *real* danger, Ina?"

"Pray don't start a fresh subject to-night," interposed Lady Isabelle. "You can discuss that point another day. Ina, I cannot allow you to remain a minute longer."

Ina went at once,—Aubrey remarking with a smile, "I shall not rest satisfied till my question is answered. Good-night,—and don't dream of long cloaks or blue lights."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Some are brave one day, and cowards the next."
TEMPLE.

"ANNIE! Mignonette! Oh, Lady Isabelle, *may* I come in?" exclaimed an eager voice outside the room, at breakfast-time next morning, and Cecily's face—flushed and disquieted—appeared round the door.

"Come in," said Mr. Vincent kindly. "We have nearly finished breakfast."

Cecily entered, holding her hat in her hands, and twisting the strings with a rapid movement of her fingers, as she said impetuously—

"Papa will be here himself this morning to apologize, Mr. Vincent. But I could not rest without coming up the first thing to tell you how very much vexed we all are. I do hope Cyril is not really the worse for it."

"He is lying in bed an hour longer this morning,"

said Lady Isabelle, who, ready as she was in private to blame Cyril's weakness, was no less ready in public to defend him. "Any shock to his nerves always makes him poorly afterwards."

"I am so sorry," said Cecily again as she sat down. "But indeed we had no idea of such a thing."

"How did you hear what had happened?" asked Aubrey.

"Gordon told us. Of course he knew we should hear it from you if he did not. And papa and mamma were *so* angry,—especially with Lawrence. He must have known the harm that it might have done. But I hope poor Cyril is not really ill?"

"Oh, no," said Mr. Vincent cheerfully. "Only a little shaken and low-spirited,—and ashamed of himself."

"I can't help being glad he was not quite alone," said Cecily. "But, Ina, *you* could not have known anything of it beforehand?"

"No," said Ina hesitatingly. "Only I was asked——"

"I asked her to come with us," said Guy. "I knew what was going to be done."

"Gordon told me so," said Cecily, "and I was surprised. But I don't think Gordon will do such a

thing again in a hurry. And Lawrence leaves home the day after to-morrow."

As she showed no signs of sorrow herself over his approaching departure, no one felt bound to look concerned, and the news was received with such a general air of complacency, that Cecily could not help laughing.

"It is too bad," she said. "But I really am too angry with him just now to want him to stay long at home; and I am sure it is not good for Gordon. But here comes Cyril."

Very pale, tired and depressed he looked, and so evidently disliked all allusion to the events of the preceding evening, that the subject could hardly be pursued in his presence. Ina pitied him from her heart, and longed to cheer him. Not an unkind look or word was bestowed upon him by any one of the party, but this only seemed to make him more downcast than ever.

Immediately after breakfast Guy was closeted for a while with his father. No one knew what passed between them, but Ina was glad to see him come out in his usual spirits again. The only allusion he made to the interview—if allusion it could be termed—was the uncalled-for observation,—"I say, Mignonette, I don't think there's one single father in the whole world like mine. He knows exactly what to

say, and where to stop, and never thinks of kicking a poor fellow when he is down." But to what the last enigmatical sentence referred, Ina could only conjecture, as Guy afforded no explanation whatever.

Later in the day, when she found Cyril hanging listlessly about the house, dull and unoccupied, she begged him to accompany her down to the shore. Antonia and the other boys, and, perhaps, Mr. Davies also, were going in a little while, but would not he start with her at once and wait for them on the beach? Cyril evidently did not care one way or the other, so Ina found Antonia, explained that she wanted to get Cyril out at once because he looked so unhappy, and in a few minutes returned to him, ready for the walk.

They chose the short cut through the garden, and down the steep stony path. Ina did not talk much by the way, but she went at a pace that forbad time for thought, and brought quite a colour into his cheeks as well as hers. When they reached the bottom Ina turned to the right, leading the way to some low rugged seaweed-covered rocks. Cyril flung himself down on the shingles, and drew his cap over his eyes; but Ina, who had seated herself upon a small square fragment of rock by his side, was not inclined to allow silent meditation.

"Look, Cyril, at those beautiful shadows on the water," she said. "Are they not lovely?"

Cyril looked because he was told, but he did not seem particularly enchanted.

"Don't you like to see beautiful things, Cyril?"

"I suppose so," said Cyril.

"But you must know it, if you do. Oh, don't cover up your face like that! Are you not well?"

Cyril sat up, and leant his chin on his hands, answering briefly in the affirmative.

"Then don't look so grave and unhappy. Please don't. Indeed, there is no reason."

"No reason for *you* to look so," Cyril said with emphasis.

"Nor for you either." Ina slipped off her rock to the shingle by his side as she spoke. "Cyril, it is only yesterday evening that makes you feel so."

Cyril winced, full of sympathy as the tones were. "What's the good of talking about it?" he muttered.

"Do talk about it," she said pleadingly. "It is so much better for you than being miserable in secret. And I know you feel miserable to-day."

The words were a home-truth which could not be denied. Cyril pulled his cap again over his eyes, turned away his face, and sighed heavily.

"But indeed it is not a thing that you ought to be miserable about," continued his kind comforter. "It is not as if it were a fault of your own."

"Worse than a fault," muttered Cyril. "If it were one I might cure it."

"And could you not cure this—in time?"

He shook his head.

"I don't know anything about it, of course," said Ina. "But it seems to me, that if you would face the thing steadily,—would reason with yourself——"

"I have reasoned with myself a hundred times," said Cyril wearily. "Sometimes I think I never *can* behave in such a manner again, and then when it is dark the feeling comes back."

"Will you tell me what the feeling is like?" asked Ina after a moment's pause.

Cyril shuddered.

"I can't describe it," he said huskily. "It is a kind of horror that turns me quite cold, and takes away all my power."

"I see," Ina said, as gravely as if he had been a patient, and she the doctor examining his case. "And what makes you feel like that?"

He moved impatiently, but could not refuse to answer those soft tones.

"Anything. In the dark, I mean."

"But why do you mind the dark more than the light?"

"I don't know. There's no reasoning with it. I can't help it."

"But, Cyril, you don't really believe all those silly stories about ghosts?"

"Of course I don't," replied Cyril. "But that doesn't alter the case. I tell you it is a feeling that I can't reason with."

"It is not really fear, then?"

"Not animal fear; not reasoning fear. What does that matter? The shame is the same. And I cannot get over it."

"I wish I could help you," said Ina, raising her eyes to his face, so full of compassionate sympathy that he could hardly face their glance. "Cyril, I can't help thinking that if at such a time you remembered how really safe you are,—that nothing could harm you without the will of God,—you would hardly feel the same. Have you ever tried?"

"I don't know," said Cyril listlessly. "Of course I know that."

"But I don't mean only knowing it," said Ina, sitting erect, and speaking eagerly. "I mean feeling it—realizing it—having your mind full of the thought at the very time."

"Do you think it would keep you from being afraid in real danger?" he asked abruptly. "In danger such as almost all girls are afraid of?"

Ina thought for a minute in silence, her delicately-rounded cheek resting upon her ungloved hand, and her eyes bent dreamily upon the distant horizon.

"I do not know," she said at length. "I should be afraid to boast. And I have so seldom been in anything like real danger, that I am no judge about myself. But I do think that a real Christian, who feels that the Lord Jesus Christ is always with him, and will let nothing happen but what is for his good, ought not to have fear."

"You don't know that I am one," he said, turning away his head, but she answered quickly—

"I don't *know*. I only think you are."

"Even a real Christian does not always escape dangers and accidents," said Cyril after a pause.

"Oh, no," Ina replied calmly. "But that is no reason for being afraid. If they are hurt, and have pain to bear, they know it all comes in love. And if they are killed,—it is only going home, Cyril."

Cyril was silent, and it was Ina herself who made the next remark.

"But you do not feel that. You are not afraid of being hurt?"

"No,—I suppose not,—I don't know what it is. I shall try what you have said."

Again they were silent, a brighter and more hopeful look resting on Cyril's face. Presently the remainder of the party came up, and Cyril, starting to his feet, declared he had something else to do, and could not stay any longer on the beach. No remonstrances were made, and he walked away, while Antonia sat down by Ina's side, Aubrey and Guy threw themselves on the shingles, and Mr. Davies stood at a little distance, examining through his magnifying-glass the formation of a small crab.

"Have you found a new specimen, Mr. Davies?" asked Guy, stretching himself lazily. "I hope he hasn't got an extra pair of pincers."

Mr. Davies shook his head, as he dropped the crab gently to the ground.

"Ah, you are a sad boy, Guy. I wish I could cultivate a little love of natural history in you."

"But I can't love everything," said Guy rather comically. "I never saw any one in the world that could, except you. And you not only love every study that exists, but you know everything that there is to be known."

"I am very much obliged to you for saying so,

Guy, but I hope you do not suspect me of believing such flattery?" said Mr. Davies quietly.

"Flattery! Not a bit of it," cried Guy. "Now, Ina, is there one single thing in which Mr. Davies is not a proficient? Music, languages, drawing,—you see, I'm putting the accomplishments first,—painting, mathematics, astronomy, geology, mineralogy,—in fact, all the ologies that ever were invented."

"And a great many besides, you had better say," composedly observed Mr. Davies, for though shy and retiring in society, and even before Lady Isabelle and Mr. Vincent, he was quite at his ease with the boys.

"Ina, don't you think Annie looks wonderfully well?" asked Aubrey, glancing up from his prostrate position at the feet of the two girls. "Pray don't think I have chosen to lie here on account of my humble disposition. It is simply because you are warding off some of the sun's rays."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't suspect you of such a thing as humility for a moment," returned Ina merrily. "Yes, I think Annie is getting on nicely. She has had quite a nice pink colour in her cheeks the last few days. I only wish she were less thin."

"I shall be fatter some day," said Antonia. "Mignonette, have you been talking to Cyril?"

"Oh, I wanted to ask you," said Guy, suddenly becoming graver. "How does he seem now?"

"He was more cheerful when he left me."

"Mignonette is so fragrant that she cheers every one who approaches her," said Aubrey, gazing into the sky, and addressing the company generally.

"I did not say I had cheered him, Aubrey."

"But you have! Were you not talking to him about yesterday evening?"

"No! impossible!" cried Guy, as she made no answer. "I did not know he would speak on the subject. Ina, was he very—no, not angry,—but at all vexed with me."

"We did not speak of you," said Ina, smiling. "He is vexed with no one but himself. We were talking about courage,—and whether I was brave,—part of the time."

"Are you?" Guy asked abruptly.

"I don't know. I have hardly been tried yet. I hope I am."

"Annie isn't," remarked Guy. "She has a very womanly belief in the expediency of screaming and running away on the first appearance of danger."

"I know I have," said Antonia. "But it is very common,—and very often the best way of getting help."

"Oh, yes,—if help is at hand," said Guy. "And it is not as if you were a boy. Mr. Davies, don't you think that taking us all in all—with the exception of poor Cyril—we are a pretty courageous set?"

Mr. Davies laughed slightly in his noiseless way.

"Why is poor Cyril to be excluded? I do not see that he is more wanting in bravery than most of you."

Ina smiled, understanding him at once. Aubrey laughed incredulously. Antonia and Guy rather opened their eyes.

"I don't mean of course that you all fail in the same particular," added Mr. Davies. "But I believe that there are very few people living who possess a spirit of perfect courage,—of courage without one single flaw,—though they may not always be aware of it."

"I should think that was very likely," remarked Ina.

"Pray tell us all our weak points, Mr. Davies," said Aubrey, sitting up, with a broad smile on his handsome face. "You have to prove your proposition."

Guy's countenance fell. "Ah!—I know," he said, "I'm as much a coward in one way, as Cyril

is in another. As papa says, I can't say 'No,' when I'm wanted to do wrong."

Mr. Davies gave him a slight smile, and observed, —"I know it is much the fashion to extol mere animal bravery. But for my part I cannot see that physical cowardice is one whit more contemptible or unmanly than moral cowardice."

"I'm afraid you can't just yet lay claim to perfect courage, Guy," said Aubrey. "What you will do by-and-by is a different question."

"And I have great hopes for Guy," said Mr. Davies. "He is always quick to acknowledge himself in the wrong, and he is not wanting in resolution, though sometimes he will not exercise it."

Guy looked extremely resolute at that moment, as he said emphatically,—"I mean to try in future, Mr. Davies."

"I know I am not brave," remarked Antonia. "The least thing frightens me. If I had been with Cyril yesterday I should certainly have screamed and trembled all over."

"As Guy says, your being a young lady makes mere animal courage of the less importance," observed Mr. Davies. "Yet even a lady may be in many circumstances when a little self-command would be

absolutely necessary. It is a thing that every one should strive for. I imagine Ina to possess it."

Ina looked surprised.

"Do I? I don't know. I don't think I'm brave naturally. I had no time yesterday to think about anything except Cyril. And after the first moment I felt sure it was a trick."

"But unless you had had self-command your judgment would not have had fair play, and the idea of its being a trick would not probably have occurred to you."

"Very true," remarked Aubrey. "If you had screamed and trembled, as Annie proposes, you would have had little leisure for calmly considering the nature of the gigantic figure among the trees."

"Not very gigantic," said Ina, laughing. "I believe I did tremble a little. But I was more afraid about Cyril than anything else. I thought he might be really ill, and it seemed so long before any one came to help me with him."

"I don't believe you are a moral coward either, Mignonette," said Antonia. "I can't fancy——"

She did not conclude, but Guy took up her words—

"Can't fancy Mignonette being laughed into doing wrong. No, indeed,—I am quite sure she would not."

"No, I don't think I should," said Ina. "But sometimes I am very cowardly about saying a thing which I know to be right,—just because I know it won't be liked at the moment."

"I should never have guessed it," said Antonia incredulously. "You have made me do many a thing that I did not like at the time, Mignonette."

"But it was very hard,"—and Ina's eyes glistened with pain at the bare recollection. "I had such a heart-ache when I did it," she added in a lower tone. "And sometimes I really gave way when I knew it would be kinder to go on pressing you."

"I am afraid that is a very common weakness," said Mr. Davies. "Yet I agree with Ina that it certainly is a weakness—after its kind."

"The choice of the perfectly courageous character lies then between you and me, Mr. Davies," said Aubrey, laughing yet evidently interested. "Which of us can lay claim to it? Perhaps both."

"Not Mr. Davies!" cried Guy. "He is a shocking coward. I never saw any one more afraid of being in the way. Ninety-nine times in a hundred, when every one is expecting him to make himself agreeable, he pokes himself into the darkest corner he can find, and remains there as if glued to

his seat, just because he is terrified at the very thought of being seen or heard."

Mr. Davies smiled, but attempted no contradiction, and Ina said eagerly—

"Oh, no,—not cowardice,—only—only—"

"Modesty," suggested Aubrey.

"No, I plead guilty to Guy's charge," said Mr. Davies pleasantly. "I have always been a sad coward in society. Well, Aubrey, will *you* lay claim to a character of perfect courage? No one else seems inclined to do so."

"I ought to be modest, and blush, and profess myself a coward, I suppose," said Aubrey, looking amused. "But I have been thinking all this time, —and—really the fact is I don't know what to accuse myself of."

There was a general laugh and clapping of hands, which had some effect in bringing the desired blush to his cheek, though he could not help joining in the merriment.

"Don't be unmerciful, pray," he said. "You will drive me to inventing, like Topsy, who told a story in default of anything real to 'fess. I cannot plead guilty to any inclination to scream or tremble in danger,—or to any fear of the dark,—or to any difficulty in saying 'No' when I am laughed at,—or

to any shrinking from society,—or to any great dislike of making people do what is good for them against their will. Really it is puzzling. I have a great horror of blowing my own trumpet, but I don't quite know how to make myself out a coward."

"Then you lay claim——" began Mr. Davies.

"No, indeed I don't. I only wish for your opinion,—frankly if you please. I certainly am not afraid of hearing the truth."

"My opinion simply is that hitherto circumstances have not developed any cowardly points in your character. I cannot say how it may be in the future."

Aubrey looked disappointed, but he smiled good-temperedly.

"Not over-warm praise, Mr. Davies. I see you are suspicious."

Mr. Davies' answering glance was affection itself.

"My dear boy, your own father cannot think more warmly of you than I do. Pray do not suspect me of a single unkind or suspicious feeling. I am as unable as you are yourself to indicate a cowardly point in your character. But I should be sorry to see you perfectly confident and self-satisfied. I would have you feel that courage, whether great or small, is a gift from God—a talent committed to us,—for

which we ought to be humbly grateful, as for every other blessing. I do not say that you *will* ever find yourself to be mistaken in your estimate of your own character, but this is, to say the least, quite possible. I should like you to be prepared for such a discovery."

Aubrey looked thoughtful. "Thank you for the warning, Mr. Davies. Perhaps I am over-confident."

Mr. Davies responded by repeating the words—

"'He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble, ever shall
Have God to be his guide.'"

CHAPTER IX.

" Her look composed, and steady eye,
Bespoke a matchless constancy;
And there she stood, so calm and pale."

MARMION.

It was Saturday afternoon—a hot day towards the end of August—some weeks after the recommencement of lessons. Under the auspices of Josephine Halifax the girls' studies had progressed favourably. Ina was naturally clever, and being also conscientiously industrious and persevering, she made rapid advance. Antonia's health, combined with some degree of constitutional indolence, did not allow her to work so hard or so steadily, and this kept her back. Already however she was better and happier for the regular occupation. At first it recalled sadly the time when her dear mother was her instructor, but after a while the remembrance grew less painfully

vivid, and she became in a measure infected with Ina's delight in her different studies.

Mr. Vincent was more thankful than he could have expressed, for the improvement in his child,—and Lady Isabelle scarcely less so. Delicate, Antonia was still, and her spirits were naturally less buoyant than Ina's, but she was no longer a source of constant fear and anxiety to all around her. She could walk out, though not very far, liked to read and work, and did not now spend hours in languid sorrowful idleness. Ina's bright sunny companionship and loving sympathy had, through the blessing of God, wrought this change, and very grateful they all felt to her.

But to return to the Saturday afternoon. The weather was intensely hot. A quivering mist seemed to hang over everything far and near. Not a breath of wind stirred the trees, and the wide blue waters of the sea lay in mirror-like repose, while the shore was unwashed by the faintest ripple. The girls sat in the drawing-room with books in their hands, but the air was almost too oppressive to admit of any occupation. Lady Isabelle had dropped asleep in her easy-chair,—a rare occurrence with her. Antonia presently leant back and gasped for breath.

"Oh, Mignonette, don't you think we had better

try the garden? There may be a slight breeze there. I don't feel as if I *could* bear this."

Ina rose cheerfully.

"We'll try it at all events," she said,—"though I am afraid there is no breeze anywhere to-day. Will you take your book?"

"I may as well,—though it is almost too hot to read."

They went out together, taking some old parasols that hung in the hall, to shield their heads from the sun. At the door they met the postman, and he gave Ina a letter.

"From Brussels, I suppose," said Antonia, as they went down the first flight of steps.

"Yes,—from Madame," said Ina, smiling. "I know the writing. But I won't open it till we are comfortably settled. Will you come inside the arbour, or on the grass outside?"

"On the grass," Antonia said decidedly, and they sat down on a small bank, shaded from the sun by the arbour on one side, and by two or three birches and lilacs growing closely together behind them.

"It is not cool, but it is pleasant here," Ina remarked, as she opened her letter. "Ah! I knew it was from dear Madame."

"Is she quite well?" asked Antonia, laying her

head back on the grass, and shutting her eyes. "Don't think me lazy, Mignonette, but it really is too hot for any other position."

Ina laughed, and leant back likewise, while her curls lay in confusion on the grass. "Madame is quite well," she said. "I have not read much yet."

Antonia remained silent a considerable time, till she saw Ina put down the sheet of paper, and pass her hand over her eyes.

"Mignonette, is anything wrong?"

"Oh, no,"—and Ina spoke in her usual cheerful tone, though perhaps it was slightly tremulous. "It is only a long kind letter,—just like herself. You may see it, dear."

Antonia received, read, and returned it, asking abruptly at the close,—"Do you want very much to see her again?"

"Very much——" Ina began, and paused. "But it is not likely at present."

"Why not? You have been here now over three months. Papa promised to send you back, if you wished it, after a quarter of a year."

The tone sounded cold. Ina raised herself, looking half alarmed, but one glance at Antonia's face reassured her, and she sank back on the grass.

"Annie, you frightened me. I thought you really wanted me to go."

"Oh, how could you? As if such a thing were possible! I was only afraid *you* might wish it."

"No, I should be very very sorry to go," Ina said gravely. "I love Madame very much, and I was very happy at Brussels, but it was not a home like this. Madame says herself that she could not wish me to come back."

"And if you do not wish it now, you are not likely to wish it at all?" said Antonia in a tone of anxious inquiry.

"Of course I am! I shall get tired of you all in the course of the next few months! How can you expect anything else?"

"Well, I have really felt afraid lately," returned Antonia, looking more satisfied. "I am very glad."

"I must have seemed strangely cold, I am afraid, Annie. Do you really know so little of my feeling for you—and for uncle Horace?"

"Ah! I know you love papa," said Antonia, smiling. "I can see it in your face whenever you look at him."

"I shall never forget what he was the first time I saw him," said Ina, in an unsteady voice. "So kind and gentle. Oh, I do long to do something for

him,—especially when I see him sometimes looking so sad."

"I never understood papa so well as I have done since you came," said Antonia. "I used to think that because he went about, and was busy, and was not ill, that he could not feel it—about darling mamma, I mean—so much as I did. But I see now that it was only selfishness on my part. It was just indulging myself. Even now papa cannot bear to speak of her. Sometimes when we are quite alone he says just a few words, but he never can go on."

"I wish I had known her, Annie."

"You would have loved her,—as every one did. She was not like me. We thought Cyril a little like her,—but I don't know,—he never had her happy bright look."

Antonia's voice failed, and Ina answered only by a gentle pressure of her hand. Presently Aubrey walked quietly up,—so quietly as to be unobserved by the girls. He stood almost close to them, half concealed by the arbour, admiring the pretty picture that they made together, reclining in an easy attitude on the green mossy bank, while the slender birch-boughs drooped over them, and a single sunbeam, creeping through, fell on a stray tress of Ina's hair, and lit it up as if with gold. Antonia's thin pale

face, with its drooping brown eyes, formed a curious contrast to Ina's fair bright earnest countenance, with its happy thoughtful grey ones. Suddenly Aubrey made a step forward, with a low bow, startling them both considerably.

"Wake up, ladies fair! indulging in a siesta in the middle of the day. Pray don't disturb yourselves. Perhaps you will allow me to share with you this tempting rural shade."

"Oh, Aubrey, how you frightened me!" exclaimed Antonia. "We did not hear you coming."

"I supposed not by your attitude," said Aubrey, laughing. "Pray resume it, Ina. It was very becoming."

"I don't feel inclined, thank you," replied Ina, with a smile. "You should not have come upon us so suddenly."

"Startling you from your—well, I won't say slumbers, for your eyes were undeniably open. What are you doing this hot afternoon, 'gin a body might ask?"

"Talking," said Ina. "I have had a letter from Madame."

"I hope you are not meditating a flight, Mignonette?"

"Oh, no. I am so glad she is willing to stay here," said Antonia, with a sigh of relief.

"Well, I confess I have felt an occasional qualm on the subject. I don't know what we should do now without you, Mignonette. You seem a most necessary part of the household. I had almost said *the* most necessary part."

"Thank you, Aubrey," Ina said, with a grateful glance, though she added mischievously, "The most necessary except yourself, I suppose."

"Exactly so. Well, we won't make invidious comparisons. It is to be hoped that either of us would be missed. I hope I shall next Christmas."

"When you go to college," said Ina. "Oh, I am sure we shall all miss you very much indeed. I don't like any one going away."

"However disagreeable the person may be. It makes a gap, does it not? Is that all you care for?"

"Don't answer him, Mignonette, he is fishing for compliments," said Guy's voice from within the arbour. "Are you having a private confabulation out there, or is it allowable to listen?"

"That's right, Guy; listen first, and then ask leave," said Aubrey, laughing, as Guy made his appearance. "How long have you been here?"

"Six seconds. I went into the arbour—distin-

guished voices—heard Ina's remark, and your answer—then made my presence known. I came to propose a walk on the shore with Mignonette, but really the exertion of walking here from the house has so fatigued me that I feel quite unequal to anything more. Better lie here and melt gradually, than disappear at once into vapour, as we should certainly do, if we became many degrees hotter;" and Guy flung himself flat upon the grass, whence no persuasions could induce him to move until the first bell rang for dinner.

The following day, Sunday, proved even more oppressively hot and close than was the preceding afternoon. Antonia did not go to church in the morning, Lady Isabelle deciding that she had better defer doing so until the evening. However, when the evening came, it was no cooler. Lady Isabelle was not easily kept at home, but for once she professed herself quite unequal to attempt the second service. Mr. Vincent, who had been unwell for some days, and had a bad headache, was with some difficulty induced to follow her example and remain at home; so that the younger members of the family started alone on their walk down the hill.

"I suspect there is a storm brewing somewhere," Guy remarked on the way, drawing a nervous look

around from Antonia; but the subject was not pursued, and Ina only hoped, for her cousin's sake, that the storm would keep off until they were at home again.

The prayers were concluded and the sermon was begun, before the first low mutterings of distant thunder struck upon their ears. Ina glanced at Antonia, and saw that she was looking anxious, but there was nothing to be done, and they could only wait for whatever might come.

For some time, however, though the distant rumblings continued at intervals, the storm did not seem to approach any nearer, and Ina hoped it might pass off. Then there came some bright flashes and louder peals, which made Antonia and some others present start and cover their eyes. Marcus Winnington continued his sermon with unbroken calmness, but perhaps he somewhat shortened it in consideration of the timid ones of the congregation. They were all kneeling down at the conclusion, and the blessing was scarcely yet pronounced, when a sudden impulse caused Ina to raise her face from her hands. At the same instant the whole church appeared filled by a vivid sheet of flame, from which seemed to flash innumerable sparks, accompanied by a tremendous crash of thunder. A powerful sul-

phurous smell pervaded the building, and the noise of falling masonry was distinctly audible.

Ina's first impulse was to spring to her feet, and throw her arms round the terrified Antonia. Aubrey, Cyril and Guy were in a moment at their side from the other corners of the pew. Cries of alarm sounded on every side, and several ladies fainted. Marcus Winnington descended from the pulpit, and with some other gentlemen endeavoured to restore order and tranquillity; but the peals of thunder were so continuous as almost to drown their voices, and the general terror was for awhile beyond control.

There was a movement of almost the whole congregation towards the large front door,—the only door, indeed, except that leading into the vestry, which was besieged by a smaller number. Then in a pause between the claps of thunder the cry became audible,—"The tower is falling!" followed by,—"The church is on fire!" and the crowd which had surged back in fear from the door again pressed forward, preferring even the danger of the falling tower to that of fire.

Antonia crouched, faint and trembling, on her seat, but only for a few seconds. One glance revealed to Aubrey the fact that Mr. Davies was not

in his usual place that night,—that Mr. Halifax at the other end of the church was engaged with his own family,—that Alison, happily without her little boys, was quietly going to her husband's side,—and that every one near was hurrying towards the entrance. Most of them were only summer visitors to Rockstone Leigh and strangers to the Vincents, and those who knew them were fully occupied with their own wives and daughters.

One glance was sufficient to show all this to Aubrey. Then his arm was thrown protectingly round his sister's shrinking form, and Ina's clear voice said decidedly,—"You must take her out, Aubrey,—you and Cyril. She wants help."

"And you?"

"Never mind about me. I will follow with Guy. Annie must go out as quickly as possible. Can you get her through the vestry-door?"

Aubrey shook his head as he marked the crowd that literally choked it up. "Not yet," he said. "I think I can out of the other."

Ina had not distinguished the cry about the falling tower, though the alarm of fire in the building had reached her ears.

"Then don't wait," she said. "Take her quickly, Aubrey. I am not afraid,"—and her eyes

met his steadily. "I only want Annie to be safely out of the church. Don't think about me."

Little as Aubrey liked leaving her behind, there was nothing else to be done, for fright had rendered Antonia almost incapable of walking. He begged Ina and Guy to keep close after him, but in the struggle through the crowd, where his tall strong figure and determined pressure forced a way, they were soon separated. He glanced back repeatedly, but could see neither his cousin nor Guy, and Antonia required all his strength, even with Cyril's help. Once in the open air, she began to revive, and was able to walk to the Rectory, which was close at hand.

A large crowd had collected outside the church, and remained there despite the now heavy rain, while reports and conjectures were rife among them. Aubrey would not allow Antonia to linger. He hurried her across the road, where lay the scattered stones and débris that had fallen from the tower, when it was struck. It was not now supposed to be so far injured as to fall, but there was fear of fire within the building. So much Aubrey gathered, as he hastened along, almost carrying Antonia in his eagerness. Even when placed on the sofa of the Rectory drawing-room, where without ceremony he conducted

her, her nervous grasp of his hand continued, but the mention of Ina's name made it relax instantly.

"Oh, go!—go and bring her out!" she said feverishly. "How could I forget? Go, both of you!"

"No, Cyril will stay here," said Aubrey, glancing at his brother, who nodded assent. "Just get a little water for her, Cyril, and she will soon be all right again." Then turning away, he hastened back to the church door.

Ina and Guy had not yet appeared. The congregation were still coming out, and the pressure in the doorway was as yet undiminished. Aubrey eagerly inquired concerning the missing ones, but could obtain no news of them. Then he endeavoured to force a way back into the church, but to do so against the tide was beyond his power, and he stepped back, vanquished. A hand touched his shoulder, and he turned to see his father and Mr. Halifax,—the former pale and uneasy.

"Papa, are you here?"

"I came down the hill when the storm began to grow violent. Where are the girls?"

"Annie is safe at the Rectory with Cyril. He and I had to bring her out. Ina was coming out with Guy, but I cannot see them."

"Guy! what can he do for her?"

"It was her own wish. And Annie could hardly stand. I did not know what else to do."

"That pretty little Ina!" said Mr. Halifax in his deliberate tone. "She ought to be out by this time. All my party are safe, and I have sent them out of harm's way. How that crowd can stand gaping so near, I can't imagine, when the tower may come down at any moment."

"Don't stay," said Mr. Vincent briefly, going nearer himself. "You had better go farther away. I must see after that child."

"I'll wait till she is safe," said Mr. Halifax gallantly, though with a rather suspicious glance at the tower. "Keep a little off, my good people. You are putting yourselves unnecessarily into danger. What will you do, Mr. Vincent?"

Mr. Vincent did not answer. To force a way into the church at that moment was clearly impossible. Aubrey hurried off to the vestry, and did not return. Two or three minutes of great anxiety succeeded, and then just as Mr. Vincent was encouraged by the decreasing crowd to step forward, with the intention of attempting to enter, Aubrey and Guy appeared, bringing Ina out. She looked grave, but her expression was one of undisturbed serenity, until her uncle drew

her hand within his arm, and she glanced up into his face, when her own was crossed by a shade of concern.

"Oh, uncle, you are not well. You ought not to have left home."

"Come to the Rectory, my dear," was his only answer. "Is Alison out yet?"

"Just out," replied Ina. "There she is—and Aubrey is staying with her. Marcus said he could not leave the church till every one was safely out, and Alison stayed with him, till Aubrey came for me, and then he said she *must* go too."

"Guy, you had better stay with us," said Mr. Vincent. "Why did you not both come out sooner?"

"I could not make a way for Ina, papa. The crush was awful just in the doorway, and we were squeezed back in spite of all I could do, so Mignonette said we had better wait quietly with Alison for a few minutes. Just as we were going to try again Aubrey pushed his way in through the vestry, and then we got out directly. I can see Marcus in the doorway now"—and Guy looked back longingly.

"Uncle Horace, were you very anxious?" asked Ina. "How did you hear the church was struck?"

"I came down the hill when the storm became so severe, as I knew Annie would be frightened, and my

mother was uneasy. Yes, I was anxious, Ina. It is a great mercy that no one is injured."

"Is no one hurt at all? Oh, I am very glad."

"Two or three passers-by were struck by falling stones, but not severely. No one was touched by the lightning."

"The storm seems going off now," remarked Guy. "It will stop raining directly, I expect—but it is pretty heavy now. Ina, you will be wet through if you don't make more haste."

They quickened their steps, and in another minute reached the Rectory. Antonia was awaiting them in much suspense, but Mr. Vincent looked relieved at the first sight of her, for he had dreaded to see her appear ill from the effects of her fright.

"Oh, Mignonette, I am so glad to see you safe," she said eagerly. "And papa here too! And the boys,—is no one hurt?"

"Guy is in the passage," said Mr. Vincent. "Aubrey is coming after us with Alison. There they are in the garden—and Marcus too. I must apologize for so unceremoniously taking possession of their house."

Alison only smiled and said they were very welcome, while her two boys clung round her, repeatedly wishing that they had been with her, and by no

means able to enter into her thankfulness for their absence.

"You must wait here till the rain is over," observed Marcus to his uncle. "It is only a shower, and will soon cease."

"Was the crowd going off when you came away?" Cyril inquired. "I suppose this rain will soon disperse it."

"It is dispersing now," said Aubrey. "Do you think the tower is much injured, Marcus? I suppose there is no danger now of its falling?"

"I should imagine not. No, I do not think it is materially injured. I was much more afraid at first of fire, but that proved to be a false alarm."

Antonia shuddered. "I heard them call out that the church was on fire. Oh, it was so dreadful, papa! And going out under the tower too! Suppose it *had* come down!"

"I would rather be thankful, Annie dear, for your merciful preservation, than enlarge upon the danger that you might have undergone," said Mr. Vincent in a low tone of deep grateful feeling, which spoke even more strongly than did his words.

"It was a strange ending to our service," thoughtfully observed Marcus. "I cannot but hope it may be brought home to the hearts of some. That fearful

flash, at the moment that the tower was struck, brought forcibly to my mind the words—'As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.'"

He knew from Ina's quick involuntary glance that the same idea, if not the same verse, had occurred to her. The calm self-possession she had displayed, amidst the prevailing terror and confusion, had not been unobserved by him.

"No one will doubt Ina's courage after this," Aubrey remarked a little later. "Do you remember that talk we had in the holidays, Mignonette?—and your saying you had never been tried?"

"I never saw any one cooler than she was," said Guy, with a measure of pride in his companion. "Were you frightened at all, Ina, or did you really think there was no danger?"

"I knew there might be danger if the church were on fire," said Ina rather unwillingly.

"And you were not frightened?"

"No,—I did not feel so."

Guy looked curiously at her. She was flushing a little, and something in the expression of her face deterred him from asking any further questions. In another quarter of an hour the rain had ceased, and they were able to walk home. Lady Isabelle received

them with a warmth that showed how uneasy she had been. An account of all that had passed did not tend to lessen the unusual solicitude and affection that she displayed towards the two girls. The mere thought of the danger they had been in was sufficient to overcome her dignified reserve, and more than ever Ina felt how little they knew of the real and intense feeling that lay hidden beneath that calm and impassive exterior.

Antonia was sent at once to bed, and Ina, after taking off her walking things, remained to assist her, while Lady Isabelle came in and out, anxious to assure herself that Antonia had really sustained no injury. Once, when the girls were alone together, Annie said abruptly—

"Mignonette, I wish I were less of a coward."

"I would think about that another day," said Ina quietly. "It is time for you now to rest."

"But I can't help thinking about it," said Antonia, leaning back in her easy-chair, with her straight dark hair unbound, and falling over her white dressing-gown. "Is it not strange that Cyril, who so fears the dark, should not mind lightning?"

"I don't know. It is a different thing."

"But you do not mind either."

"No," said Ina simply. "I believe not."

"I wish I knew what you were thinking about

when it happened," said Antonia slowly. "Do tell me, Mignonette."

"I don't think I thought much at first. There was no time. I only wanted Aubrey to get you out safely."

"And I let him leave you behind. But I don't think I could have done it, if I had known what I was about. Tell me, Ina, what kept you from being afraid?"

Ina was silent for a minute,—a bright light shining in her eyes.

"I don't know how to tell you, Annie dear. There was nothing that I can talk about. It was only that I felt safe."

"Why?" Antonia almost impatiently asked.

"Why, I knew who sent the lightning," said Ina gently, "and that it could not touch me unless it were His will. I could not feel afraid,—any more than if I were to see a sharp knife in uncle Horace's hand. I should *know* he would not hurt me, unless for some reason it were necessary."

"But—it might be,—the lightning *might* have struck you."

"Yes—" and Ina paused again, resting on the word with a smile of calm sweetness. "I was ready," she said softly, as if speaking to herself.

Antonia sat upright, her eyes open and inquiring.

"Ina, do you mean that you really thought—thought of *that*,—and did not feel afraid?"

"I did not know what would happen," said Ina. "I suppose there really was no danger after that flash, as the tower did not fall, and the church was not on fire, and it was not likely to be struck a second time. But of course we did not know that at the time."

"I wish I could feel like you," said Antonia, sighing.

"You might wish something a great deal better than that," returned Ina, kissing her. "And you know, Annie, all people can't take things quite in the same way. Some have stronger nerves, and some stronger resolution, than others."

"Ah, but if I felt *that*, I don't think I should be afraid," murmured Antonia, leaning back again. "If I knew that I was safe *whatever* happened."

"Dear Annie, every child of God *is* safe," began Ina.

"Yes, but I can't feel it," said Antonia again, almost with impatience.

"Then pray, and it will be given you to feel it," Ina whispered. "It is only realizing how near the Lord Jesus is to us, Annie, and how He will protect us in every danger."

The entrance of Lady Isabelle prevented further conversation. But neither Antonia nor her brothers speedily lost the impression made upon them by Ina's steady calmness, in circumstances which might have proved of no little peril.

With regard to the church itself, the damage was found on examination to be almost exclusively confined to the tower. The injury was extensive, but not such as to cause any subsequent fear of its falling, and repairs were in the course of time effected without difficulty.

CHAPTER X.

"I want you to see the portrait."—A. PROCTER.

"DID I ever show this to you, Josephine?"

It was a cold dark afternoon in the beginning of November. Josephine had gone up into Ina's room to put on her walking-things, after her usual day's work with the two girls. Ina stood by the table rather dreamily for a minute or two, before asking the above question.

"What is it, dear? A brooch! No, I don't remember seeing it."

"It is a miniature of papa," said Ina, holding it out. "Do you think the face like mine, Josephine?"

"Very much. I had no idea you resembled him so strongly. This must have been taken when he was quite young. Did he give it to you?"

"It was taken just before he was married," said

Ina. "No, he did not give it to me. He used to show it to me, and say I should have it when I was a little older. I had another picture of him. But this belonged to dear mamma, and he was very fond of it. It came to me afterwards in the desk,—almost the only thing it contained of any value."

"This is the desk, is it not?" said Josephine, touching a large handsome mahogany brass-bound one on a side-table.

"Yes,—I thought I had shown it to you before." Ina unlocked and opened it as she spoke. "Look,—in this part I have put everything, just as it was sent to me. Some letters from him to mamma soon after their marriage, and a few from her to him, and two or three from grandmamma—his mother, you know,—just a little while before she died."

"And no allusions in any of them, Mignonette, to your relations?"

"Only one or two speaking of people by their Christian names. Nothing that was any guide to us. We did not know who they were, or where they lived, or even if they were still alive. We only made out that both my grandpapas and grandmammas were dead, and that papa never had any brothers or sisters,—but that was all. It always seems so strange that there should have been nothing else. I know

Madame thinks there were some things stolen, though she will not allow it."

Her eyes were cast down and full of tears. Josephine remarked kindly,—

"It is very trying for you to have lost everything that belonged to him."

"Oh, it is not so much the things themselves,—only I can't help fancying there may have been papers,—and that I might have known what he really thought and wished. Sometimes it comes over me so painfully,—am I really living where he would not like me to be?"

"My dear Ina, that seems most improbable. What possible or imaginable reason could he have had, for wishing you not to be in such a happy home?"

"But he did! He never even let them know that he had a child. You have heard all the story, Josephine. He kept me away as carefully as if it had been the most miserable home in the world. I cannot—*cannot* understand it," and Josephine saw the small hands clasp—almost wring one another, with distress.

"I think you are making yourself unhappy without sufficient cause, dear," she said, sitting down, though aware that it was growing darker every

moment for her lonely walk down the hill. "His death was so sadly unexpected that he had no time for making arrangements. I cannot believe he would deliberately have left you in such strange ignorance of your relations. And I feel no doubt that there really *were* papers telling you about them, if only they had reached you."

"I am glad you think so," said Ina gravely. "But even then,—the perplexing part is still the same,—what could have been his reason for being so secret, even for a time?"

"You told me once that your uncle said it was an unfounded or at least a mistaken reason. Cannot you trust him?"

"I do," said Ina quickly. "But I can't help wishing to know more. Sometimes I lie awake at night, and think, and wonder what it could have been. I am so afraid it may have been caused by—by—that papa may have been offended,—or at least not pleased,—with something or some one in the family,—and so he might have wished to keep me apart from them. I can't explain well, but that is what I am afraid of."

"I see," said Josephine thoughtfully. "But Ina dear, why should you say this to me? Why not ask Mr. Vincent if you really are right in your fancy?"

"Oh, no, I could not. Madame did ask him

about it when he came to Brussels, and he would not explain. I asked him too, and he passed it off. Oh, I could not think of such a thing. And I did not mean to speak to you about it, Josephine,—only I know it is perfectly safe with you, and I have been thinking about it a good deal to-day, so I suppose I want a little sympathy. You won't repeat it."

"You may trust me, dear. I never repeat things. But, Ina, you must not allow yourself to be anxious and unhappy. If you do, I might think it my duty to inform Mr. Vincent of the reason," she added playfully.

"I am not unhappy," said Ina quietly,—"only sometimes a little afraid,—lest some day something should come out,—and I love them all so very much that I dread anything which might separate us."

"My dear Mignonette, I thought you had more common sense. Whatever may 'come out' in the future, you may be pretty sure that it will be no news to Mr. Vincent, and you may be perfectly certain that he will never willingly part with you." Then, as Ina looked still unsatisfied, she added,—"I really advise you not to think any more about it. If your uncle does not wish you to know, it would be scarcely honourable of you even to attempt to find out,—would it? I cannot but think the idea is a little

fiction of your own imagination. You surely would not suspect Mr. Vincent of having done anything in the past to annoy your—"

She checked herself hastily, vexed at having even suggested such an idea, but the colour rushed like a flood into Ina's face, and she exclaimed in distress,—

"Oh, no, no, no! You don't think I *could?*—oh, *no*, Josephine."

"Of course not, dear. It was stupid of me to ask such an absurd question. But if I were you I really should try to put the whole thing as much as possible out of my head."

"I will try," said Ina slowly.

"You will be the happier for doing so. I am sure of it, dear." Josephine kissed her face affectionately, as she added,—"You know where to cast your burden, Ina. Leave it there, and do not allow yourself to dwell on possibilities and probabilities. Put the whole question aside for the present. Some day when you are older you may know more."

"I will try," repeated Ina.

"I must say good-bye now, or I shall not reach the bottom of the hill before it is dark. Tell Annie I had not time to look into the school-room again."

"Oh, I ought not to have kept you so long,"

said Ina regretfully. "I am so sorry. May I ask Mr. Davies to let Guy go down the hill with you? I am sure he would."

"No, I am not at all afraid. I shall run down in a very few minutes." And with a hasty farewell, Josephine hurried away.

The remembrance of the past little scene was in her mind during her dusky walk. She wondered whether there were really any foundation for such an idea as that which evidently pressed upon Ina. What but some such reason could have caused Mr. Mignon's separation from his relations? The thought of her own hasty suggestion recurred to her mind, together with the burning blush with which it had been received. Had the same thought occurred to Ina before? Was it barely possible that it might *not* be an entire mistake? Why else should Mr. Vincent so studiously conceal from Ina all he knew of her father's past history?

These questions flashed through Josephine's mind, and the next instant she tried to put them away, angry with herself for having allowed them even one moment's encouragement. Yet she could not entirely succeed. They returned again and again, till she wondered whether poor Ina were teased in the same fashion. Teasing it really was, and no more, for she

did not actually credit the idea. That Mr. Vincent —the gentle, refined, kind-hearted, high-principled, Christian Mr. Vincent!—that *he* should have done anything which could serve as a reason for Mr. Mignon's singular and inexplicable conduct, was she felt almost an impossibility. Still she found herself unable to banish the fancy entirely from her mind.

She did not of course feel at liberty to mention even to her mother anything of her conversation with Ina. But she was glad to take the first opportunity that offered itself, of making a few inquiries respecting the past life of the Vincents. When alone that evening with Mrs. Halifax, her father being out, and Gordon learning his lessons in another room, she remarked, by way of commencement,—

"Mignonette seems quite to have settled into her new home, mamma."

"Entirely," said Mrs. Halifax, without pausing in her work. "And to have ingratiated herself with Lady Isabelle, which is still more surprising."

"I don't know, mamma. I think it would be most surprising of all if any one could help loving her. The wonder is that she should not have been here for the last seven or eight years, instead of only the last few months."

"That was her father's doing."

"I know it was,—and I often wonder what could have been the cause. You never knew Ina's father, did you?"

"Never. I cannot even recall hearing his name mentioned, until the arrival of the letters from Brussels last spring. Mr. Vincent has always been reticent about his own affairs,—Lady Isabelle still more so. Long as we have known them we really are very ignorant of many things concerning them."

"And dear Mrs. Vincent,—she never talked much about such things either?"

"No, she did not. But I do not imagine her silence on the subject to have been caused by natural reserve, so much as to have arisen from compliance with her husband's wishes,—still more with Lady Isabelle's. Poor Mr. Vincent! he has felt her loss terribly. What a blessing Ina has been to them all! I never saw a more melancholy household than theirs was after Mrs. Vincent's death, until she came. She seemed to shed a brightness round her, from the very first day."

"And she always seems quite devoted to Mr. Vincent," Josephine remarked slowly, recalling with renewed vexation her own unwise suggestion concerning him. "Almost more fond of him than even of Annie, which is saying a good deal. But he seem.

quite to have adopted her as one of his own children. She certainly wins affection wherever she goes."

"And she will. I cannot imagine Ina without friends."

There was a pause, and then Josephine remarked—

"The Vincents did not always live in this house, mamma. I can remember, when I was quite a little child, their annual summer visit of a few weeks. I must have been seven or eight years old before they really came and settled down at Rockstone."

"You were eight. It was shortly before Antonia was born,—perhaps six months before. Cecily was a baby then."

"What made them come?" asked Josephine. "Mr. Vincent had losses, had he not?"

"Very heavy and unexpected ones. I never heard particulars, but I know that he was a wealthy man before, with a beautiful estate in one of the midland counties, and a large house in London, so that quiet little Rockstone had but a small share of their attention. I believe his chief losses were through the failure of some London bank. We were very sorry for them when they were reduced to live here altogether, but they never invited confidence or sympathy, and always seemed very cheerful and happy,

so it is surprising how seldom the subject has been mentioned."

"It must have happened very shortly after Mr. Vincent came into possession of his estates," remarked Josephine thoughtfully.

"It was only a few months after Lady Isabelle lost her husband. But Mr. Vincent was an only son, and he and his wife had lived entirely with his parents. I believe their losses were a very severe trial to Lady Isabelle. She never encouraged the slightest allusion to them in conversation, and I should fancy Mr. and Mrs. Vincent's reserve was chiefly owing to her. They have been invariably so considerate of her wishes."

"I always like to see Mr. Vincent with her," said Josephine. "If she were a duchess he could not be more courteous."

"He is that to every one," responded Mrs. Halifax quietly. "It is the reverence in his manner to her that is so striking. As to mere courtesy, you have only to notice his manner to the two girls,—to you and Cecily also. From Annie's very infancy he has treated her as a lady, and the consequence is that she has grown up as complete a lady as he could desire."

"I know what you mean, mamma. I have often

noticed him place a chair for one of them, or rise to open the door if they leave the room, or,—oh, there are a hundred little attentions of the kind which hardly strike one at the moment. Don't you think Aubrey will grow up like him?"

"I have very little doubt of it in the course of time. A courteous gentlemanly manner is not less infectious than a rough ungentlemanly one. Cyril and Guy too will have a large measure of it, though they resemble him less than Aubrey does."

"Poor Cyril!" remarked Josephine. "I always think Mr. Vincent was very kind about that provoking trick of Lawrence's in the holidays. He is so particular about Cyril being gently treated, that I feared at the time he would be very much annoyed. Don't you think it is almost a pity, mamma, that that boy is given way to so much? I am sure Lady Isabelle does not like it."

"No, perhaps not. But I can hardly wonder at Mr. Vincent's feeling. It was the one thing in which Mrs. Vincent would not give way to Lady Isabelle. She dreaded that a struggle with the weakness would only increase it, and always said she hoped for the time when Cyril would feel the necessity of endea vouring to conquer it himself."

"I think he has improved lately," said Josephine.

"Once or twice, when I was there in the evening, he actually went out alone for something that had been left on the lawn, after dark, and came back with the thing he went for, though he was as white as a sheet. Poor Mr. Vincent watched him so anxiously, but I was glad he made no attempt to check Cyril's going."

"Mr. Vincent is too wise for that. It is only that he will not have him forced into doing what is painful to him. And I really think he is in the right. Fighting with the evil would probably only make it worse, unless the boy himself were determined not to be overcome."

"I always think there is a great deal in resolution," Josephine remarked, speaking lightly, and not perhaps thinking at the moment how weak are all human resolutions, unassisted by Divine strength. She little knew with what earnest prayer Cyril was carrying on the struggle against his own weakness of nerve,—as little as she knew that it was Ina who had persuaded him to commence it, and who induced him still to persevere.

CHAPTER XI.

" Danger may be
At an hour when all seemeth
Securest to thee."

" THE fly will be at the door directly. What a time the girls are arraying themselves!" exclaimed Guy.

" One would think you were going too," remarked Aubrey, laughing, as he sat on the arm of Lady Isabelle's chair, reading a book which he had placed on the back. " If grandmamma and I are not impatient, I don't know who else has a right to be," and he glanced at Lady Isabelle, who stood by the table, looking very handsome and stately in her black velvet dress. Mr. Vincent was away from home, having spent the previous night at the house of a Mr. Hardwicke, who lived about three-quarters of an hour's drive from Rockstone Leigh. Lady Isabelle, Antonia, Ina and Aubrey were now going to spend the evening there, and bring Mr. Vincent home.

"Here they come!" Guy observed. "No, it's only Ina. How pretty she looks!"

The last words were in an undertone, but they were not far from the truth. Her worked white muslin dress and blue ribbons set off well her delicately fair features and complexion, and showed to advantage her massive curls. At first sight she might have been pronounced young-looking for her fifteen years and three quarters, but even a casual observer could not have bestowed a second glance without being struck with the composed and lady-like manners, and the sweet thoughtful womanly expression. Antonia might be taller, and more formed, and might possess greater regularity of feature, but she was far less womanly as well as less attractive than Ina.

The boys however loved their sister too well to dream of making any disparaging comparisons. Guy declared that the "get-up" of both young ladies was "stunning;" and when reminded by Aubrey's expressive glance that slang was not considered admissible into the Rockstone drawing-room, he endeavoured to cover his misdemeanour by helping his grandmother to put on her shawl, with great assiduity.

"That is not enough for you to wear, Annie," said Lady Isabelle, turning to her. "It will be a

long drive, and I can't let you run the risk of taking cold. Ina, just call Benson, and tell her to fetch Annie's little knitted shawl. Or better still her hat. Get your own too, and then you will both be secure against taking cold."

Ina obeyed willingly, and by the time matters were thus arranged the fly was at the door. It was an unusually clear night for the end of November,—though, as Guy remarked, "the end was so *very* near, that they need not be surprised at having a little bit of December come in by mistake." Lady Isabelle and the girls stepped in, and Aubrey was following them, when he suddenly drew back.

"What is the matter?" asked Lady Isabelle.

"Only that old book on ferns that I promised to take to Mr. Hardwicke. I'll get it in a moment, grandmamma. It was put on the second shelf of the large cupboard in the dining-room. I know the exact spot, so I don't need a light."

He was gone without waiting for Guy's offer to seek it for him. Had the delay been caused by any one but Aubrey, Lady Isabelle would have been annoyed, but as it was she bore it with unmoved equanimity, only desiring the coachman to put up the windows, as the air was sharp. Cyril remained where he was, on the steps. Guy sauntered slowly

into the hall, and just as he reached it a distant crash, as of broken glass, struck upon his ear.

"Hallo! Aubrey, are you smashing the windows?" he shouted.

There was an instant's pause, and he made his way in the direction whence the sound proceeded. Then he heard the words, "Guy! come here!" in a tone that made him hurry with all speed to the dining-room. Aubrey had left the cupboard, which was in reality a large square closet, almost a room. There was no light beyond that of the moon, but sufficient was afforded by the latter to reveal him leaning heavily on the back of a chair.

"Is anything the matter?" Guy asked in consternation. "What is it, Aubrey?"

"The glass cases in the cupboard,—I fell over them and cut my wrist. Don't frighten grandmamma."

The words came slowly as if he had hardly power to speak,—the last sentence being scarcely audible. A candle and matches lay happily close at hand, and Guy speedily struck a light, but he was horrified to find Aubrey covered with blood, ghastly pale, and scarcely able to stand. He had sufficient self-command to help him towards the sofa, but Aubrey sank to the ground before he reached it, and Guy rushed to the front door.

"Grandmamma!—Ina!—Benson!" he shouted. "Aubrey is hurt!—he has cut himself awfully!—make haste and come!"

His cries reached the carriage before he did himself. Lady Isabelle with almost youthful vigour sprang out, followed by the terrified girls, and hastened to the dining-room. One glance was sufficient,—and she turned to Guy, pale but decided;—

"Go at once in the fly for Mr. Halifax. Make the utmost haste, Guy, and bring him home with you. Do not delay for an instant. Every moment is of consequence."

Guy was gone in an instant. Lady Isabelle bent over Aubrey, terrified with the frightful rapidity with which the blood was gushing forth. Antonia grew sick and faint at the sight, and was obliged to quit the room, but Ina remained firmly by Lady Isabelle. Aubrey was not yet unconscious, and he tried to smile as he said,—"It is nothing,—only a cut,"—but the words were inarticulate, and he was growing every instant more cold, white, and powerless.

Lady Isabelle knelt by his side, with her clean white cambric handkerchief in her hand, at the same time desiring Benson in a hoarse tone of authority to hasten for something more suitable to the purpose. Ina produced her own, and with her trembling fingers

assisted Lady Isabelle to tie up the injured wrist. Benson left the room, and then went into violent crying, remaining absent, while Charlotte, the only other servant within call, was equally helpless. Ina quitted Lady Isabelle, and flew upstairs for what was wanted, but notwithstanding all their efforts the blood still poured forth, and the faintness was becoming death-like.

Cyril, who had taken Antonia away, now returned. Lady Isabelle was hanging over the pallid and now senseless face, with a look almost of anguish in her own, and rising hastily she went to meet him.

"Cyril," she said, drawing him towards the door, and speaking in a tone that was sharp with intensity of anxiety and distress,—"this cannot be allowed to continue. He will sink if it goes on much longer. You must run as fast as possible to the Rectory, and bring Marcus and Alison. They may arrive long before Mr. Halifax, in case he should be out, and I think they will know what to do." Then, as she saw or fancied she saw him shrink, she added almost sternly, —"This is no time for nonsense or babyish fears, Cyril. Put them aside at once, and go, for your brother's sake,—to save his life, it may be!" She turned from him as she spoke, her usually calm steady face strongly agitated.

Cyril went to the front door without a word of remonstrance. He took his cap, stepped out on the gravel-path, and there stood for an instant, glancing round with a suppressed shudder. Before he could move on Ina flew to his side.

"Oh, Cyril, Cyril, you will make haste!" she panted. "Do not think of yourself, but only of Aubrey. I know you will not fail. You know Who is with you, and you are quite quite safe. Oh! do, do make as much haste as you possibly can. I would go, but I cannot leave grandmamma. It is so dreadful to see him lie there."

Even as she spoke she was drawing Cyril along the path, and with one more eager,—"Oh, do make haste, and don't think of yourself, but only of him!" she turned and hurried back to the house.

Cyril pursued his way rapidly,—surprised at himself for not experiencing more uneasiness. Once or twice, when he glanced around him at the dark stems of the trees, and realized that he was alone, a qualm came over him, but the next instant he recalled Ina's words—"I know you will not fail! You know Who is with you, and you are quite quite safe!" A feeling of shame at his own weakness succeeded, and he rushed on, resolutely refraining from casting a single look round. In truth, his mind was so full of

terror for Aubrey, the recollection of his brother's pale unconscious face was so vivid, that he had scarcely time for any other thoughts. And with less trouble from nervous fears than he would have imagined possible, he reached the Rectory, and rang the bell violently.

Alison was alone in the drawing-room when he burst in, and she looked up in surprise. "Cyril! What is the matter? Who has come with you?"

"No one," panted Cyril. "Grandmamma wants you and Marcus at once. Aubrey has cut his wrist frightfully—over some glass cases in the cupboard,—and we don't know what to do."

"Marcus is out, but I will come at once," said Alison, starting up. "Conrad, don't delay me. You and Alick must stay here quietly till bed-time. I will be back in one instant, Cyril."

Cyril stood, breathless and impatient, until she reappeared, cloaked and bonneted. "Now I am ready. Good night, my darlings. I must go at once to poor Aubrey."

Not till they were fairly off, and pressing with all speed up the hill, did she inquire,—

"How did it happen?"

"He went back to fetch something in the dark, just as we were going to start. I believe the glass

cases were put into the cupboard a day or two ago, when the room was cleaned out,—the curiosity-cases, you know. I suppose Aubrey did not know they were there, or forgot it, and fell over them in the dark. Guy found it out first, and called us all. Aubrey was lying on the ground—covered with blood."

"Is the cut so deep as that?"

Cyril shuddered. "I don't know how deep! It looked dreadful! And his face—"

"Was that hurt too? I thought it was only the wrist."

"Yes,—but he looked so dreadfully ill. I don't wonder grandmamma was frightened. Alison, shall you know what to do?"

Alison was doubtful. "I hope Mr. Halifax will come soon," she said. "If he is delayed I will attempt something. I have had some experience in cuts, though none like this I am afraid."

"Can't you walk a little faster?" asked Cyril. "Oh, I wish I had gone for him to fetch the book,—it would not be so bad then."

"Nonsense, Cyril. It is as bad for one as another. Aubrey would not wish that I am sure."

"No, but grandmamma cares for none of us as

she does for him," said the boy huskily. "Are you tired, Alison? Can't you go so fast?"

Alison nodded, but was becoming too breathless to speak. They pressed on in silence, till they entered the garden, when an exclamation of joy from Cyril proclaimed that the carriage had returned. Guy came out to meet them.

"Mr. Halifax is here," he said in a tone very unlike his usual joyous one. "And the fly is going off at once to fetch papa. Ina has written him a little pencil note."

"And Aubrey?" asked Cyril. "How is he now?"

"Mr. Halifax and grandmamma and Ina are with him." Guy paused a moment, and then added,—"They can't bring him to himself."

"Have you heard Mr. Halifax's opinion yet?" asked Alison, as she removed her bonnet and cloak.

"I went into the room, but I was of no use, and I couldn't stay there," said Guy hoarsely. "I could see that he thought badly of it. Annie is in the drawing-room, crying herself ill."

Alison could not wait to attend even to her, till she had gone to the dining-room. Aubrey had been lifted to the sofa, and his wrist was bound up, but the stains on the carpet and his clothes, as well as the

pale unconscious face that lay on Lady Isabelle's arm, revealed to her how severe the injury must be. Ina's face, in its steady repose, at first reminded her of the time in church during the thunder-storm, but the next moment she saw that every feature was strained and quivering with nervous distress, and taking from her hands the scent-bottle and fan she said gently,—

"Run out of the room and drink a little water, dear. You have been a good useful child, but I can help your grandmamma now."

Ina obeyed, only because her powers of endurance were for the time almost at an end. Guy was waiting in the passage, and met her with a face of eager inquiry,—"Mignonette, is he better yet?"

Ina shook her head, unable to speak for a minute from the choking in her throat. Guy seized her hand, and fairly pulled her into the hall, where he made her sit down, and then paused in perplexity, not knowing what she wanted. Her whisper of,—"Water, please," sent him off like a shot, and in a minute more he was holding the glass to her lips, for she trembled too much to take it.

"Can you tell me now?" he asked, when she had swallowed a few mouthfuls. "I don't want to tease you, but just to hear how he is."

"I don't know," said Ina, sighing. "He looks

just the same, and he hasn't moved or spoken yet. Mr. Halifax says he will presently."

"What are they doing?" asked Guy impatiently.

"Everything they can. I am going back directly, and the moment he is better I will let you know."

"You are not fit to go yet. Come and see Annie, won't you? I wish you could persuade her not to cry so. She will make herself quite poorly."

Ina complied at once, though rather fearing lest her own self-command should be upset by the sight of Antonia's distress. However she was no sooner with her, than her habitual sympathy for others came into play, and the next ten minutes or more were spent in cheering and comforting Antonia. Not till the latter's helpless sobbing had almost ceased, did Ina again leave her with Cyril, and return to the dining-room.

The group there was much the same as when she quitted it. Lady Isabelle still sat supporting Aubrey's head, and Mr. Halifax and Alison still stood by the couch, engaged in making use of fan and salts and other restoratives. Alison, however, whispered to Ina,—"He has looked at us once or twice." And even as she spoke the brown eyes opened languidly, glanced round, and then closed again with a fresh accession of faintness.

Ina was so thankful for even this gleam of improvement, that she stole out to tell Guy, and he ran away with the good news to Antonia and Cyril, while his informant returned to the room she had left. Another weary half-hour stole by. Then the sound of carriage-wheels in the garden made Ina again glide lightly into the hall. She went to the front-door with Guy, and stood there while her uncle stepped out. He uttered not a word, but Ina knew by his face, and by his tight grasp of her hand, how anxious he was, and she said quickly—

"Aubrey is a little better, uncle. He has opened his eyes several times, and they are only waiting for your help to carry him up to bed."

"How did it happen?" asked Mr. Vincent briefly.

Ina rapidly related the particulars, while walking with him towards the dining-room. They went in silently, but the sound of Mr. Vincent's footsteps seemed to rouse Aubrey more than anything else had done.

He opened his eyes again, with a dreamy smile, and said feebly,—"It seems so stupid to have kept you all at home—for a mere cut."

"My dear, we don't mind anything if you are better," said Lady Isabelle, in a voice that shook with agitation.

Aubrey's head sank again upon her arm. "It is nothing, grandmamma. Only I can't sit up. I don't know why."

"You are weak from the loss of blood," Mr. Vincent said quietly, though a heavy cloud of anxiety rested on his face, as he felt the feeble pulse. Mr. Halifax's face, never a cheerful one, was now far from reassuring. "I wish you were in bed."

"We were only waiting for your assistance to take him upstairs," said Mr. Halifax, and Aubrey again looked up with a murmured—

"Can't I walk?"

Mr. Halifax shook his head, and Aubrey yielded with a languid acquiescence, which was a contrast indeed to his usual spirited determination in the smallest matters. Ina could not stay and see the removal. She heard them say that the motion had made him faint again, and then hastened to Antonia in the drawing-room. Guy followed her a few minutes later, and threw himself on a chair, with a sigh.

"Is he upstairs?" asked Ina.

"Yes,—nearly in bed. Conscious, but hardly able to speak. Oh, dear!—to think that it might all have been so easily prevented."

"If only he had had a light," said Ina.

"Or if that stupid Charlotte had not left the

cases in such a place. That's the reason she would not come near us, when she was wanted."

"Does Mr. Halifax think it very bad?" asked Antonia.

"He looks as if he did," replied Guy, sighing again. "Not dangerous,—I don't mean that, Annie, —don't look so frightened. Only he is very weak with the loss of blood, and I suppose it will be some time before he gets over it. And—"

Guy did not conclude the sentence, and Ina would not ask what he had thought of saying, before Antonia. A little later, when they were alone together, she inquired what he had meant to tell her.

"It was no good putting it into Annie's head," said Guy. "Only, Ina, Mr. Halifax is afraid Aubrey may not have the entire use of his hand again."

"Oh, I hope not," said Ina earnestly. "I mean I hope he will. Did Mr. Halifax tell you so?"

"No,—but I heard it. I went in after Aubrey was in his room, and I heard him whisper half to himself,—'I wish it had been my left hand,'—and then papa took Mr. Halifax out of the room, and I went with them. Papa asked Mr. Halifax if there was any fear,—for the hand I think he meant,—and Mr. Halifax said he could not at all tell at present, but he certainly feared it might affect the use of it

in some degree, though we must hope the contrary. Oh, Ina, only think of it! So fond as he is of boating, and cricketing, and everything,—such a first-rate hand at it all too!"—and Guy laid his head down on his arms, with something very like a sob.

"But we will hope Mr. Halifax is mistaken," said Ina cheerfully, though her eyes were full, for it would indeed be sad and strange to see the active high-spirited Aubrey in any way disabled. "Doctors often are."

"Sometimes. I only wish it had happened to me. Any one would be better than Aubrey,—such a fine brave fellow as he is. I never saw any one up to him in a single thing."

Ina thought she could have said the same, but as her acquaintance with boys was exceedingly limited, she fancied it might seem presumptuous to hazard an opinion on the subject. So she only remarked,—"I think every one likes Aubrey that knows him. But I must go now, and order some tea to be brought into the drawing-room. Grandmamma has forgotten all about it, I suppose."

"I would if I were you," said Guy. "I'll tell Annie and Cyril to come—and you can find papa and grandmamma. Will you?"

"Oh, yes, I will ask them," said Ina, going

towards the door. "Only I suppose grandmamma will want to stay with Aubrey, so the tea will have to be taken to her. It is a good thing we all had early dinner, for no one would have felt inclined for it now. However, it won't quite do to go to bed fasting, though we do all seem to have forgotten to be hungry."

But though she saw that the tea was nicely prepared, and pressed every one to partake, she could not eat herself, and she was glad to escape to bed. From very weariness she fell asleep almost the moment she lay down, but her dreams of broken glass, startling falls, and injured wrists, were incessant throughout the night, and she was very little rested when morning came.

CHAPTER XII.

"It's hardly in a body's power
To keep at times frae being sour."

BURNS.

"Do pull that blind down, Mignonette. My eyes ache with the glare."

Ina obeyed cheerfully, though she had already altered the arrangement of it nearly half-a-dozen times within the last hour. Antonia had gone for a walk with her father, and Lady Isabelle was taking a little rest in the drawing-room. More than a month had elapsed since Aubrey's accident, but until the last three or four days he had been almost entirely confined to his bed, with weakness and suffering. He had at length begun to rally, but the improvement was as yet both slow and small.

Perhaps hardly any form of illness, however acute, could have been more trying to one of his eager active temperament, than the continued and excessive

exhaustion of the last few weeks. At times too he had suffered severe pain in the injured arm, which now lay helplessly in a hospital sling. Hardly more helplessly than he lay himself upon a couch, near the fire. His face was wasted and pale, the brow looking broader than ever in contrast with the hollow cheeks, while the eyes had a heavy languid expression which strongly recalled to Ina's mind her first sight of Antonia. There were, however, lines of discontented and almost fretful weariness around both eyes and mouth, which Ina had never observed in Antonia. These were very plainly discernible now, as she took up her work, and sat down on a square stool, between his sofa and the fire. For a minute there was silence, and then he said again,—

"Can't you stop that perpetual clicking of the needle, Ina? You don't know how wearisome it is."

"Oh, yes,—I am sorry," said Ina cheerfully, putting away her work. "Would you like me to read to you now?"

"Thank you,—I don't know," said Aubrey listlessly. "I don't think I could listen just now to anything you could read."

There was a slight stress on the "you," and Ina looked puzzled.

"What is it that you want to hear, Aubrey?

This—?" as she followed his glance to the corner of the mantelpiece, and took down a book. "Oh, but it is Greek."

"I know. I said you couldn't read it."

"Will nothing else do?"

"I don't care about anything else. I want to study."

"But you are not strong enough yet,—even if I could read Greek."

Aubrey smiled a little at the latter idea, but the restless look returned, and he said with a sigh,—"Just hand it to me, Mignonette, and let me see if I can't construe a little. I don't believe it would hurt me."

"It will only throw you back, and keep you ill a few days longer," said Ina, playfully yet resolutely, as she restored the book to its place.

"A whole month and more lost already,—and I don't know how much longer to wait before I can do anything again!" muttered Aubrey. "So much for my intentions of hard work these holidays, in preparation for college!"

"It is only put off a little longer," said Ina quietly.

"Yes, but it is all so much lost time. Let me just try, Mignonette. Hand me the book for a minute or two."

"Not without uncle's or grandmamma's leave. I'm not an independent authority, please to remember, but only acting deputy."

"I wish you would act being agreeable and doing as you are asked," said Aubrey, amused in spite of himself. "What a determined little thing you are, Mignonette, though you do contrive in general to appear so gentle and yielding."

"Am I?" said Ina quietly. "Yes, I hope I can be determined, when it is for your good. But you may try to read this book, if you like, by way of experiment."

"That story-book! Well, if it is an experiment I'll submit, though the book does not look over tempting."

He found it more interesting than he expected, and persevered for some minutes, until eyes and head and hand were alike weary.

"I believe you are right," he said, throwing it down with a sigh. "I could manage it a little longer, if I had some support for my book, but I can't go on holding it up with my left hand."

"And the reading makes your eyes and head ache, Aubrey. So you see Greek is out of the question at present."

"I'm not likely to forget that, when I can't even

read for ten minutes without feeling knocked-up. You did not want to convince me of the fact, by way of cheering me up, I suppose?"

There was some sharpness in the tones, notwithstanding their languor. Ina made no answer, but she rose, drew the window-blinds lower, put some more coal on the fire, and resumed her seat.

There was a pause, and then Aubrey inquired again, more gently—

"Did you think I wanted depressing by a discovery of my own limited powers, Mignonette?"

"I wanted to convince you that you would make yourself ill, if you did not keep quiet," said Ina. "And you have talked enough, Aubrey. I wish you would rest."

"I can't sleep half the night, as it is, and I shan't sleep at all if I am to do it in the daytime."

"I don't care about your sleeping,—if only you would not tire yourself by being so restless," said Ina rather sadly. "I know it keeps you back."

"Keeps him back from what?" asked Mr. Vincent coming in. "Well, Aubrey, how are you?"

"He is making himself feverish, uncle, because he can't study Greek," said Ina smiling.

"Study in this state," said Mr. Vincent. "No, no, you must grow strong and well first."

"How long must I wait, papa?"

"Perhaps that depends upon yourself, at least in a measure. When you can sit up and move about a little, I dare say you will be able to read."

"And to write?" asked Aubrey, knitting his brows.

Mr. Vincent glanced at Ina.

"By-and-by," he said.

"*Shall* I be able to write, papa? Does not Mr. Halifax think I shall lose all use in my hand?"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Ina in tones of distress.

"No, I do not think Mr. Halifax at all expects that, Aubrey," said Mr. Vincent. "It may of course in a measure affect the use of your hand, though I trust that even that may be averted."

"But you won't have to wait until your wrist is quite well," said Ina encouragingly; "because people often write with their left hand. When you are strong enough to sit up, I will help you to learn."

"Thank you," said Aubrey,—adding rather gloomily,—"A pleasant prospect!—to learn writing when I had hoped to be working hard at college."

He did not speak petulantly, but the words were discontented, and Mr. Vincent looked grave;—"It

was not by your choice or mine, Aubrey," he said, "that such a prospect lies before you. If it were, you might perhaps have some reason to complain."

Aubrey felt the rebuke.

"Well, I have grumbled enough for one day," he said, turning away his head. "You had much better go, Mignonette, and leave me alone. I shall only say more cross things if you stay, and you must have had enough of me for one afternoon."

"Go, dear," said Mr. Vincent gently, before she could speak. "Your grandmamma is coming immediately, and I shall be here till then. I ought to have told you before that Cecily is waiting for you in the drawing-room. She came home yesterday evening, and wishes very much to see you."

Ina went obediently, though she would much rather have stayed. Until the last few weeks she had always known Aubrey so bright and well and high-spirited, that it was very sad to see him weak and depressed, and she was really happier while with him, than while absent. Neither Lady Isabelle nor Antonia had the slightest power over him, in the restless fits of weariness and impatience which frequently assailed him. Ina sometimes was able to cheer him up, though not always.

Cecily was seated in the drawing-room, with her arm round Antonia's waist, talking fast and eagerly. Another half-year's absence had wrought alterations in her appearance, but except that her face was more formed, and her dress more womanly, she hardly looked older. Ina gave and received a warm embrace, and was pulled down on the sofa.

"You dear little Mignonette! I thought you were coming directly! What a time you have taken walking down stairs!"

"Have I?" asked Ina quietly.

"Yes,—if you came directly Mr. Vincent went to call you. Oh, Mignonette, it is nice to be at home again, and to think I am not to leave it in six weeks."

"Is it quite decided that you do not return to school?"

"Quite. And I am sure I have had enough of it. How do you two get on with Josephine?"

"Very nicely indeed," said Ina, with much warmth. "She is so kind and clever. We are very very fond of her."

"She says you began your holidays a week ago."

"Nominally," replied Ina. "In reality we have been very irregular all the time Aubrey has been so ill."

"Poor Aubrey! He is improving now, is he not?"

"Oh, yes," Antonia said. "He is on the sofa at last."

"So papa told me. And I asked him whether Aubrey would be able to go to college as soon as he had intended. Papa said—'No, certainly not.' He really gets on very slowly."

Antonia's face fell, but Ina asked quickly,—"Does Mr. Halifax say that?"

"About his getting on slowly? Oh, no, that is my idea, and I don't know anything at all about it, only it seems a long time since the accident. But the last few weeks of the half-year always creep at school. Don't stay with me, Annie, if you have anything to do. You look rather impatient. Mignonette will take care of me for a few minutes, and then I must go."

Antonia rose, promising to return if Lady Isabelle did not want her, and Cecily only waited till the door was closed behind her, to exclaim,—

"Mignonette, I hear from Gordon that he hardly ever sees anything now of Guy,—in comparison with what he used to do. What can be the reason?"

"I suppose Guy has found some better employ

ment, than running after Gordon into mischief all day long."

"Now, Ina, I call that a positively malicious remark, for such a gentle creature as you to make. You are very unmerciful upon poor Gordon. And Guy was such a nice friend for him."

"But what if the nice friend is the follower instead of the leader, Cecily?"

Cecily shook her head.

"Ah,—I see to whom the separation is owing. Did you persuade Guy to cast Gordon off? Now mind you tell me the truth. I am very fond of you, Mignonette, but I must stand up for my brother,—even if I quarrel with you about him."

"Stand up for him by all means," replied Ina, smiling, "but I don't see the least necessity for our quarrelling."

"You matter-of-fact, little Mignonne. Of course I don't really mean it. Only I can't help being anxious about Gordon. If he loses all his nice friends and gets bad ones, what will become of him?"

"I hope he will not," said Ina gravely.

"But Guy is really the only nice friend he has," said Cecily.

"I am sorry he is so badly off," said Ina. "But I don't quite see how I can help him to find more."

"You can help him by encouraging Guy to continue his friend. I can't think why you wished to separate them."

Ina's merry laugh was uncontrollable.

"Who said that I did, Cecily?"

"No one, but I feel sure of it. Can you deny having done so?"

"I have not tried to deny it yet."

"I declare I shall lose all patience," exclaimed Cecily, laughing. "Won't you answer me soberly? I have been longing to ask you about it, the last two or three months, but I would not do so by letter. Are Guy and Gordon really friends no longer?"

"I don't think they ever were friends according to my idea of the word," said Ina gently but steadily. "They see one another less than they used to do."

"Never were friends! My dear Mignonette! Why, they were perfectly inseparable."

"Yes, but I don't think it was friendship. They were thrown a great deal together, and their tastes suited perhaps. But—"

"But you think Gordon didn't do Guy any good! Oh, Mignonette, it is too bad. I did so hope Guy would have done Gordon good."

Ina shook her head,—slightly yet decisively.

"Why not?"

"Because Gordon is a boy of more character and resolution than Guy, and he is the elder too. Guy would yield to him in everything."

"Then it really was you, Mignonette, who persuaded him to give up poor Gordon!"

"I don't think he has any intention of giving him up. He asked me once what I advised, and I said that if he felt Gordon led him into mischief, it would be wiser to keep a little apart from him. What else could I say, Cecily dear?"

"And so you wanted to make Guy fickle," said Cecily, vexed, yet unable to be really angry.

"No,—only to do what is right. I would not have told you this if you had not asked so many questions."

"And I have no right to be annoyed, after squeezing it out of you! Only one thing more I must know, Mignonette. Did Mr. Vincent wish Guy to see less of Gordon?"

Ina could not deny it, so she only said pleasantly,—"I am not bound to answer for uncle Horace. You had better ask him yourself, Cecily. But I am quite willing to bear all the blame—if blame there is."

"*If* there is! I should think there was indeed! So much as Gordon admires you too. Both he and

Lawrence say you are the prettiest girl they ever saw."

Ina's look was certainly not one of pleasure. She made a quick involuntary motion, as if to withdraw her hand from Cecily's. But resisting the impulse, she only said as dryly as she was ever heard to say anything,—

"I am very much obliged to them."

"But you don't look flattered, Mignonette. Do you know that Lawrence is coming home the day after to-morrow?"

"I had forgotten it, but I dare say I have been told."

"You naughty *Mignonne!*—you really are too insulting. However, I see you are immovable about the boys. I think I shall advise Gordon to attack you on the subject himself."

"If he does, I shall refer him to uncle Horace."

"Did you think I was in earnest?" cried Cecily, laughing, yet half-startled by the flash of those soft grey eyes. "No, no, you need not be afraid. Here comes Annie again, and I must say good-bye. Annie, I never saw such a change in any one as there is in you. You have positively a colour, and you have quite lost that way of going about as if you had no strength to put one foot before the other."

"I am a great deal stronger," replied Antonia. "I think that on the whole Mignonette proved a better doctor than—"

"Don't finish your sentence, pray," interrupted Cecily, starting up. "I have had quite enough of disparaging remarks for one day. Good-bye, you dear little Mignonette. I can't be angry with you, though you do most richly deserve it."

Ina accompanied her out to the front-door, and then returned to Antonia, who inquired,—"What does she mean?"

"Only that she accuses me of persuading Guy to break with Gordon. I did not exactly like to say that Guy saw now what a bad friend Gordon was for him, but I think she saw that I meant it."

"No harm if she did," said Antonia quietly. "Papa is very glad that they do see less of one another. He was always afraid of Gordon's influence, and yet he could not well forbid the friendship."

"Guy will never forget having been led into playing poor Cyril such a trick," said Ina. "I think it was that which fully opened his eyes. And our little conversation the next day by the sea,—that helped him in determining to have as little as possible to do with Gordon."

"He has kept his determination then. And I believe you have had a great deal to do with it, though you don't like to acknowledge it. How has Aubrey been this afternoon?"

"Oh, about the same as usual. He is very restless, poor fellow."

"He always is," said Antonia. "I feel so ashamed of myself for being annoyed at his unreasonableness, when I remember how kind and patient he used to be with me a few months ago."

"It seems so unlike Aubrey," said Ina. "But he has never been ill before, has he?"

"Oh, no, never. I don't know that he was ever in bed for a single day."

"Then it is quite a new thing to him. And I don't think anything can be harder to bear than that exhausted feeling that he so constantly has. I don't wonder it makes him difficult to please."

"It is no wonder at all," said Antonia. "And yet somehow I forget all that at the time,—when he grows so fidgety and restless, and makes us change everything in the room a dozen times over, and wants so many things that he can't have."

"We must take it as his way of being ill," suggested Ina. "He does not complain about his own feelings, and grumble incessantly about being weak

and poorly, as some people would do, but he is restless and distressed about little trifles."

"I believe you are right,—you understand every one, Mignonette, and you make excuses for them too, which you would never dream of making for yourself. But now I am going to Aubrey, and you are to sit here and read, for you haven't had a single half-hour to yourself all day. Here's your book, and here's the place you are reading. You see I know exactly what you are about. Now good-bye, and remember you are a prisoner here till the first dinner-bell rings."

Ina's excuses for Aubrey were perfectly true, but Antonia's remark that she would never have made them for herself was perfectly true also. Accustomed as Aubrey had been all his lifetime to almost unbroken health, it was no small trial to patience and temper when he found himself laid entirely aside, unable to cross the room without feeling giddy and ill, unable to read a book for ten consecutive minutes,—and—which was worst of all,—disabled in his right hand for an indefinite length of time. Ina, with her quick penetration into the feelings of others, soon discovered that this, more than anything else, was the cause of his irritability.

She said nothing, but quietly took measures for

assisting him in the neglected studies, which they all knew weighed heavily on his mind. As yet he was able to bear nothing except occasional reading aloud, and the very fatigue, caused by a continued effort to attend, made him chafe and fret so unrestrainedly, that Mr. Vincent was several times on the point of forbidding it altogether until he was stronger.

However, as the holidays passed by his strength slowly returned, and by the time Mr. Davies again appeared in the house, after his month's absence from Rockstone Leigh, he was again downstairs, and able to employ himself, though still thin and pale, and wearing his arm in a sling. Kind Mr. Davies was quite touched by the alteration in his pupil's appearance,—more visible now than even when he had been ill in bed,—and he was not only touched but grieved at the sharp weary tone and irritable manner, with which the girls' efforts to amuse him and pass his time were too often met.

Perhaps the silent reproof that Aubrey read in his face, the first evening after his return, disposed him to feel even more compunction than he would otherwise have done, after a discovery that he made the next morning. He was leaning back on the sofa, alone in the drawing-room, with a book upon his knee, which he turned slowly over, with a knitted

brow and an occasional sigh. Suddenly Ina stood by his side,—smiling and blushing a little,—

"Is that Greek, Aubrey? Are you going to begin it again?"

"Not much good to talk of beginning again, when I can't write a single line," said Aubrey rather bitterly. "And I had made up my mind to do all this—as far as that page—in the holidays."

"I'll write it down, if you will dictate to me."

"You can't. This is translation into Greek,—not Greek into English."

The bright colour in Ina's cheeks grew deeper, and her eyes flashed mischievously.

"But I can write Greek,—or print it,—whichever is the right word."

Aubrey opened his eyes incredulously.

"I don't mean that I know anything of the language. But something you said one day made me fancy that I might be able to help you, before your hand was well enough to hold a pen. I asked you if Cyril or Guy could not write at your dictation, when you were well enough to begin Greek again, and you said they had quite enough to do of their own work. But I have not, for I don't learn Greek with Josephine, you know. It has been such fun learning the alphabet with Guy, and if I wrote for you I should

learn some of the words as well. So you need not mind making use of me, Aubrey. I am afraid it will not be very quick work, for you would have to spell the words to me, but I will do my best."

"Nonsense, Mignonette," said Aubrey rather huskily. "It won't do at all. It would take up I don't know how much of your time."

"It won't take more than you are welcome to use," retorted Ina gaily. "I shall only look upon it as a sort of Greek lesson every day. Only don't spread it abroad that I am so *blue* as to know the Greek alphabet. Would you like to begin now?"

The offer was too tempting to be resisted. She procured pen and paper,—then sat waiting in silence for him to speak. Presently, with a laugh, she held up a specimen of her powers.

"There, Mr. Aubrey!—I have scribbled off the whole alphabet twice over, while you have been dreaming over your book. Guy says I write better than he does."

"You do," said Aubrey absently,—adding with abruptness,—"Mignonette, I can't understand you in the least. You are a perfect enigma to me. I wonder you are not tired of the very sight of me."

"Why should I be?"

"Don't ask why. You know very well the way I have gone on. Mr. Davies spoke truly enough last summer."

Ina laid down her pen, not seeing any immediate prospect of having to make use of it. "What do you mean, Aubrey?"

"Why,—that talk of ours on the beach, about courage and cowardice. Don't you remember it,—and the horridly conceited way in which I laid claim to the possession of perfect courage?"

"I did not know you laid claim to it."

"Something of the kind. Not perhaps in so many words. At all events Mr. Davies' warning was most just. And I have found out my weak point at last. Mr. Davies' face yesterday evening put the idea into my head."

Ina knew now what he meant, but she said nothing, and he added,—

"I never could have imagined that I should find a little pain and weakness so hard to bear."

"It was more than a little. And boys always find that kind of thing harder to bear than girls do."

"There is no reason why they should."

"Only that they are naturally more active and restless, and I think they have naturally less endurance."

"Less fortitude," said Aubrey. "And fortitude is one of the finest kinds of courage. You can't deny that. It is much nobler to bear up patiently under a long-continued pressure, than to go through some quick short trial with credit."

"I dare say it is," said Ina quietly. "But I believe that as a rule boys have the most courage, and girls the most fortitude."

"I believe *you* possess an equal amount of each, Mignonette."

Ina shook her head, with an incredulous smile.

"Have you ever been ill?" asked Aubrey.

"Not often. I was once for some weeks."

"And how much temper did you show then?"

Ina hesitated a moment.

"I dare say I showed a great deal more than I knew."

"Did any one say so?"

Ina answered reluctantly in the negative,—adding, "But I suppose they were too polite."

"Do you remember feeling cross, then?"

"Not particularly. But then—"

"Well?"

"I was too happy."

Aubrey could not help laughing.

"That is the very thing. Why was not I 'too

happy' also?" More gravely he added,—"However, I doubt whether yours was mere common fortitude, Mignonette. You would not have thought it *right* to give way as I have done,—and I dare say you were as careful of your nurses as they were of you."

"Are you not ready for your Greek, Aubrey?"

"Not yet. Are you tired of talking about yourself? Well, I won't tease you any more. But I don't mean to have Greek just now. I have kept you talking long enough. Besides, I am tired."

The last plea had more effect than the first alone would have had. Ina put away the writing materials, wondering a little over the past conversation. Others, who had not heard it, wondered still more at the change in Aubrey from that day,—the sudden and almost entire cessation of irritable contradictory remarks. Lady Isabelle ascribed it to improved health,—Mr. Vincent to the tutor's influence. Both no doubt were in a measure right.

CHAPTER XIII.

" There are moments of anguish, so deadly, so deep,
That numbness seems over the senses to creep."

M. J. PRESTON.

"WHAT lovely weather! One would think it was the beginning of June, instead of only the beginning of April," remarked Ina.

"Or the middle of July," said Aubrey, who stood near. He was now almost himself again in appearance, though his recovery had been a tardy one, and he was not yet very strong. "Who is that in the garden? Conrad or Alick?"

"Alick," said Antonia, looking out. "What does he want, I wonder?"

"He's pulling the leaves off the geraniums," exclaimed Guy, and he shouted in rather a startling tone,—"Hallo! Mr. Meddlesome, leave those plants alone."

Alick looked up, but showed no signs of being discomposed, and sauntered leisurely into the house.

"I've a note from mamma," he said.

"For grandmamma?" said Antonia, as she took it. "Why did you not come in at once, Alick?"

"I don't know,—there wasn't any hurry," said Alick demurely. "It's only to ask Mignonette to go to-morrow."

"To go where?" asked Ina, while Lady Isabelle opened and read the note.

"With us, I suppose. We're all going, and Mignonette's asked too."

"To spend the day at the Hardwickes'," said Lady Isabelle, looking up. "Marcus and Alison wish to take you, Ina. Alison says,—'Mrs. Hardwicke has written again, begging us to take Ina with us, as she has staying in the house a cousin of hers,—a Mrs. Williams. Ina will know about her I dare say. She seems, from what Mrs. Hardwicke says, to be very anxious to know our Mignonette.'"

Lady Isabelle paused, and Ina exclaimed,—

"Mrs. Williams! Oh, it must be Mary's mother!"

"Mary Williams,—the young lady who was the means of introducing you to us?" asked Aubrey.

"Yes,—at the school in Brussels. Oh, I should like very much indeed to see Mrs. Williams."

"It would be nice for you," said Lady Isabelle thoughtfully. "Yes, I think we must let you go. Alison apologizes for not asking Annie too, but she is afraid they would not have room in their little carriage, or she is sure Mrs. Hardwicke would be delighted to see her."

"Conrad is to sit on the back seat with Mignonette," remarked Alick. "And I am to sit between papa and mamma in front. That's how we did when Cecily Halifax went for a drive."

"Pray is that arrangement yours or your mother's?" asked Guy. "I rather suspect it to be a fabrication of your own."

"I don't fabricate," said Alick,—a somewhat unexpected remark from the lips of seven years old. "Of course it will be the same as last time."

"You had better sit down, Alick, for a few minutes," said Lady Isabelle. "I am going to write a note to your mamma, and you must take it back carefully."

Alick nodded to the latter injunction, but preferred standing to sitting, and walking to standing. He roamed about the room, noiselessly enough, but more than once placing vases and other ornaments in

imminent peril of breakage. Lady Isabelle spoke sharply, and Ina quietly installed herself as his guardian, following him about, and keeping him interested, until the note was finished.

"I have told Alison that one of the boys will take you to the Rectory before ten," observed Lady Isabelle, when he was gone. "We must not let her send the carriage up here for you."

"Oh, no,—I should think not, grandmamma," replied Ina warmly. "I am very glad I am going,—but I wish you were coming too, Annie dear,—or that you would go instead of me. Oh, I wish I had thought of that sooner."

"What,—when you are invited and I am not! Oh, Ina! Besides I have been there so often, that I should not enjoy it as you would. You have never seen the place yet, have you?"

"No, I only saw Mr. and Mrs. Hardwicke when they called here. I liked them very much."

"Alison is much more intimate with them than we are," said Antonia. "Except papa,—he knows Mr. Hardwicke very well. Mr. Hardwicke is scientific, and likes to talk over things with him."

"I was asked one evening with all of you, but Aubrey kept us all at home," said Ina, glancing at him with a smile.

"Very unintentionally," replied Aubrey.

"And they only have one little boy," said Ina half-inquiringly.

"Only one," Antonia answered. "He is Conrad's age, and a great friend of his and Alick's. But there are generally visitors staying in the house. Mr. Hardwicke is a rich man, you know, and the house is a very large one."

"Near the sea, is it not?"

"Yes,—but higher up than we are. The house stands on a level place, and the grounds reach to the very edge of beautiful high white cliffs, overhanging the beach. I am very glad you will see it. Only don't come back out of conceit with poor little Rockstone."

"No fear of that," said Ina, with a joyous laugh. "I shall never love any place as I do this."

"Not even Brussels?"

"Oh, no,—I never really felt Brussels my home. I loved dear Madame very very much, and so I do now, but she is not a part of Brussels."

"Not so far as brick and mortar are concerned, certainly," Aubrey dryly remarked.

The next day was lovely and warm as an April day could be. Ina was up and about at an early hour, light-hearted as a lark, and busy as a bee. She

gathered and arranged the usual bouquets of flowers in the drawing-room, copied out a paper that she knew her uncle wished to have that day, and mended a rent in one of Antonia's muslin dresses, before breakfast. Mr. Vincent and Antonia scolded her playfully for beginning her day with such hard work, but she enjoyed herself all the more for it afterwards. When breakfast was over she had only time to dress and run down the hill with Guy to the Rectory.

The basket-carriage was already waiting at the door when she arrived, though Alison was not quite ready. Contrary to Alick's predictions, Ina found herself placed on the front seat beside Marcus, while Alison sat behind with her two little boys. She entreated in vain for some other arrangement,—for one of the boys in front, if she might not go behind herself. Alison only smiled and retained her place, while Marcus gathered up the reins, stepped in, and the next moment they were off.

It was a very enjoyable drive. The heat was almost equal to that of Midsummer, but the air had all the sweetness and freshness of early spring. A large portion of their way lay through woods near the sea, and occasionally they were so near as even to distinguish the murmur of the waves upon the shore. Marcus glanced smilingly from time to time at the

happy face by his side, but said nothing, until Ina became suddenly aware that she was acting the part of a very unsociable companion, and they talked—gravely and cheerfully by turns—during the remainder of the way, almost without a break.

So agreeable was the drive that Ina was quite sorry when it was over. They entered a beautiful flower-garden, and drew up before a fine handsome porch. Ina was too simple and free from self-consciousness to be troubled with awkward shyness, and she followed Alison into the lofty drawing-room with her usual gentle grace of manner. Mrs. Hardwicke and her husband shook hands with her warmly. The three little boys disappeared almost instantaneously from the room, to the evident anxiety of the two mammas, and Ina could hardly help smiling at the polite endeavour of each to conceal her feeling from the other. Then a hand was laid suddenly on her arm, and a kiss was bestowed upon her face, while a lively voice remarked,—

"We are cousins, my dear, though strangers. You must not refuse me a kiss."

Ina gave it willingly, and was satisfied with her first glance at her new cousin. Not tall, rather plump, with smooth brow, grey hair, spectacles over her eyes, and variable kindly mouth,—this was Mrs.

Williams, and a very promising Mrs. Williams in Ina's estimation. She could not help remarking,—

"You are so like Mary."

"Am I? Very likely. And you are like—yes, you are the very image of your poor father. I only saw him once or twice, but I can trace a very strong resemblance."

"I believe I am thought like him," said Ina gravely.

"Of course you are. No one could help thinking so. There is only a little difference in the expression. He was a very handsome man, so you may take it as a compliment. But come,—we will leave Mrs. Winnington with Mrs. Hardwicke, and you shall take off your things in my room. Unless you would like a little stroll in the garden first."

"I should like it very much if it will not trouble you."

"Not at all. I am as proud of my friend's garden, as if it were my own. And the spring flowers are lovely this year. Come along,—and never mind Mrs. Hardwicke. I told her you would be under my charge to-day."

Ina willingly obeyed, and they made their way out through the conservatory,—Mrs. Williams picking up an old hat and shawl by the way.

"They are good enough for a country place like this," she remarked. "I always keep them lying here close at hand. Though, properly speaking, I am much too old for hats. That is a very pretty one that you have on."

Ina laughed.

"I trimmed it myself, Mrs. Williams."

"Did you? Ah, you are clever with your fingers, I suppose,—like my Mary. But you know you need not call me Mrs. Williams. Cousins don't do that kind of thing. My name is Mary—Cousin Mary."

Ina started and coloured.

"Oh, but I would rather, please," she said earnestly, shrinking from the very idea of calling this middle-aged strange lady by her Christian name.

"Ah, you have not had much to do with second and third cousins, older than yourself. But as you like. Do you often hear from Mary?"

"Sometimes," said Ina, looking relieved. "Not often. I write every now and then."

"That is right. She likes you very much,—so much that I wanted to see you myself."

"I am sorry," said Ina gravely. "You will be disappointed."

"What! in you?" Mrs. Williams laughed merrily, and putting her fingers under Ina's chin

pulled up her face, to give it a kiss, as she might have done to a little child. "You need not be afraid. Is not that a pretty fountain?"

It stood in a large round basin, which was surrounded with rockwork. The perpetual splash of the water had a soothing lulling effect, and Ina remained lost in dreamy enjoyment, till Mrs. Williams tapped her arm.

"My dear, do you wish to stay here all day?"

"Oh, no,—I am so sorry I have kept you," said Ina, starting. "I only meant to stay a minute."

"Instead of which you have stayed nearly fifteen. But come,—I am going to take you indoors, that you may rest before lunch. We have it at a quarter to one to-day I believe. Afterwards I dare say they will all come out on the lawn."

Chatting cheerfully they returned to the house in very leisurely fashion. Mrs. Williams took Ina up to her own room, and kept her there until lunch was on the table. Then they reappeared together,—Ina looking amused and happy, while her new friend still engrossed the chief part of the conversation. Mr. Hardwicke made a few attempts to converse with Ina, but she was so monopolized by Mrs. Williams, that he gave it up with a very expressive smile, which nearly upset Ina's gravity.

After lunch she had more freedom. Mrs. Williams said that she always went to lie down for an hour in the afternoon, and kind as she was Ina did not regret a little time to herself. They all went out together upon the lawn, and one or two young ladies, who came for a call, were detained for a game of croquet. Ina was not greatly taken with their appearance, nor with their careless rattling style of conversation. She played one game with them, and finding that there were enough to form two sides without her,—another party of callers having arrived, and been likewise detained by good-natured Mr. Hardwicke,—she asked Alison in a low eager tone,—

"Do you think I *might* go and look at the garden a little more?"

"Don't you want to play at croquet?" asked Alison, smiling.

"I don't care for it, and every one can't play. I would much rather go for a ramble."

Alison referred the matter to Mrs. Hardwicke, and she granted cordial permission, to which was added the injunction,—"But take care, dear, that you don't lose your way. If you really like it better than croquet pray go. But play, if you care for the game, Miss Mignon."

"I don't," Ina answered, smiling. "If it is not rude to run away, I would much rather look about the garden."

"Go then, dear, by all means. Mrs. Williams will soon come, and she will find you before long, wherever you may be."

A little mischievous determination to give Mrs. Williams a longer search than she expected, prompted Ina to run lightly down the narrowest and most winding path she could find. Small trees grew thickly on each side, though occasionally Ina was stopped by a pretty bank of spring flowers, or a small fountain singing and sparkling merrily, or a shady arbour which she could not resist entering for a moment, or some tempting side-path, leading away in a new direction. At length she began to fear they would think her quite rude to remain so long absent, and she slowly retraced her steps.

Not far from the croquet-lawn, but still entirely hidden amongst the trees, she found a shady grassy bank, with a tiny stream trickling past and disappearing into the ground. Ina could not resist the combined attractions of water, grass and trees, and with the intention of remaining only five minutes, she threw herself down, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the moment. The ripple-ripple of the

little stream, the rustling of such leaves as were yet out, and the gay singing of the birds, mingled with the distant subdued voices of the croquet-party, gave her a dreamy sense of repose and isolation. She even closed her eyes, and leaning her head against the arching root of an old tree, fancied herself sailing away—away through the distant blue air, like the lark whose clear notes fell distinctly on her ear.

Voices near did not suffice at once to rouse her. She knew she was well hidden from view, and no one was likely to leave the pathway and venture into this most retired of nooks. Recognizing that of Mrs. Williams, she smiled at the thought of being concealed so close to her, and resolved to move directly,—but the spot was almost too delightful to be quitted. Then the voices drew a little nearer, and she distinguished the words,—

"A very sweet girl! Quite a peculiar style of beauty. Oh, yes, I fully agree with you, Mrs. Winnington."

"It is so nice for her to live where she does," was the answer in Alison's low-toned voice.

"Very nice. So noble and forgiving too on her uncle's part. At least if the story I have heard be true. All about the failure of the bank, of course every one knew at the time. But I have

also heard it mentioned as a fact that, in some way, Mr. Vincent really lost his large fortune entirely through her father."

The words fell upon Ina's brain like a weight of lead. Until the mention of Mr. Vincent's name she had heard carelessly, without the remotest idea to whom the speakers referred. Now it was only too plain. She tried to sit up and make her presence known, but her heart beat so wildly that all power to move or speak was for the moment gone. She could only remain in passive endurance, striving not to listen, while every word of Alison's answer reached her with terrible distinctness;—

"I was not aware that any one knew it, out of their immediate circle, except ourselves. I know my uncle has been at all times most anxious that it should not be talked about,—and he is doubly anxious now."

"So I have heard,—and for that reason I would not mention it to any one, whom I did not know to be acquainted with the fact. But I am ignorant of all particulars. I only know something was wrong,—something hushed up,—something which would not bear speaking about,—relating solely to Mr. Mignon, in addition to the blame which fell upon him in common with all the directors."

"My uncle would be exceedingly displeased, if he heard the subject mentioned. I do trust you will be very careful, Mrs. Williams, and not speak about it to any one. Long as he has lived in Rockstone Leigh, the manner in which he lost his fortune is not known even there,—except perhaps that it was partly through the failure of a bank. His own children do not know more."

"Were they not told before Mr. Vincent knew of Ina being in Brussels?"

"No,—never. He is entirely silent upon the subject. I have never heard either him or Lady Isabelle refer to it, however slightly."

"Then I am glad I never mentioned it to Mary, and that I have hitherto been so careful. It was not told me under promise of secresy, but still I was warned not to talk."

The voices were dying away in the distance, and Ina distinguished no more,—but she had heard enough to crush her to the very earth with grief and horror.

CHAPTER XIV.

" Till now thy soul has been
All glad and gay ;
Bid it awake and look
At grief to-day."

A. PROCTER.

FOR a full quarter of an hour after Mrs. Williams and Alison had passed on, Ina sat dumb and motionless, with her head resting on her hands, and sharp shivers as if of ague passing through her whole frame. At length she rose,—pale, cold and trembling,—but not to return to the lawn. She could not yet be seen. She must first have time to think over what she had heard, and to regain some degree of self-command. With throbbing temples and failing limbs she hastened away,—away from sight and hearing of others,—with a feverish longing for solitude,—on and on, till the trees grew thin, and a wide expanse of deep blue ocean opened out before her.

It was a lovely spot. A few bare yards of stunted

grass at the very edge of a high white cliff, with trees closing in behind her, the sea in front, and the fair cloudless sky above. And from far below came the sound of the "waves at the foot of the rifted rock" which "murmured pleasantly."

But Ina was far too heart-sick to enjoy beauty of sight or sound. She only felt that she had reached a wild retired place, where she would be alone, yet still within Mr. Hardwicke's grounds. Sinking upon a small loose piece of rock, she pulled off her hat, threw it to the earth, and clasped her hands over her eyes. A struggle was needed to conquer the strong hysterical sobs that threatened to overcome her, but even here she might be heard, and she resolutely restrained herself, though half suffocated in the effort.

After a time the hysterical feeling became less, but her brain was still in such a whirl that steady thought was out of the question. She did not for one moment dream of doubting the truth of the assertion she had heard. But to her tender loving nature, the very idea that her own father could so deeply have injured one dear to her as Mr. Vincent, was a source of the keenest distress. It was increased by the utter uncertainty as to *what* her father had done. "Something that would not bear speaking about," was Mrs. Williams' definition, and Ina crouched

lower, with a shudder of pain at the conjectures that thronged into her aching head.

Yet intensely as she longed to know more, she felt that she could never dare to ask particulars of her uncle, —could never venture to raise the veil which his hand had drawn over the past. If he ever led to the subject, even indirectly, she might perhaps summon courage to speak, but otherwise it would be impossible. This was followed by a thrill of gratitude towards Mr. Vincent, intense overpowering gratitude, for the forgiveness of her father manifested in his conduct towards herself. A feeling of sharp self-reproach passed through her mind, for having ever allowed herself even for one moment to entertain the idea, suggested by Josephine, that the relative positions of her father and uncle, as injured and injurer, were so exactly the reverse of the reality.

The remembrance of her first arrival at Rockstone recurred to her mind. Lady Isabelle's coldness, —she could not wonder at it now. She could only wonder at her own unconscious temerity in acting as she had done. And her cousins,—what would *they* say if they knew all? Could she ever venture to meet them again? Yet she must,—and not only meet them, but conceal the grief that had come so suddenly upon her. She almost doubted whether this

would be possible. Oh, if she could only do something to repay, if but in a measure, all that they had lost through her father! But what could she do?—a poor orphan, dependent upon this deeply-wronged uncle for her very food and clothing? It was indeed a wild dream to think of such a thing.

Utterly unconscious of the lapse of time, she remained motionless upon the stone she had chosen as her seat, her hat lying by her side, her face resting on her hands, and her long curls falling forward like a veil over her shoulders, moving gently to and fro with the breeze. Suddenly a step through the bushes made her start up and seize her hat, with a feeling almost of terror in this lonely spot. It lasted but a moment, for though a stranger the new comer was an unmistakable gentleman. He was rather tall, with grey hair, and a benevolent expansive brow. He stopped short on seeing Ina, and she too hesitated, for she could not move forward without passing close to him. The next moment he raised his hat politely, with the words,—

"I beg your pardon. I fear I am intruding on private property, but I am a stranger in this part of the country, and do not know my way about."

"These are Mr. Hardwicke's grounds," Ina answered with cold courtesy, her eyes still downcast,

but the words had hardly passed her lips before the gentleman exclaimed,—

"No! Impossible! Is it?—surely it cannot be my quondam little protégée!—la Mignonne—little Mignonette—the Frenchwoman's darling?"

"Mr. Percival!" Ina exclaimed, for the first time looking fully at him, and her face lighted up, though not with the eager delight that she would have shown a short time before.

"To be sure! And how do you do, my dear? I had not the smallest expectation of seeing you here, though I hoped to have made my way over to Rockstone Leigh in the course of the next few days."

"Are you staying here?" asked Ina, trying to conceal the weight on her mind, which made gladness almost impossible, even at the sight of this old and kind friend.

"Not far off. My sister and I arrived yesterday at Tanglepool,—a little village down the hill yonder. Nice little place on the whole. We are in rooms in a farmhouse. Come, don't hurry away. By-the-by, I must not forget that I am trespassing,—though I suppose I am safe under your protection. Whose grounds did you say they were?"

"Mr. Hardwicke's. I am only spending the day here."

"Hardwicke! Oh, aye,—I know him,—had forgotten though that he lived so near. We were college friends, but we haven't met for fifteen years. I meant to hunt him up, so I'll come back with you and renew my acquaintance. But sit down for a minute or two. I want you to tell me about yourself."

He noticed the white tear-stained cheeks, the drooping eyes, and the dejected air, which she could not conceal, and mentally contrasted her with the bright joyous creature he had known in Brussels. A very natural inference he drew,—that she had not found her uncle's home a happy one. Ina obeyed so far as to resume her seat, but she did not speak, and he remarked,—

"I suppose that by this time you are quite at home at Rockstone, and do not think of returning to Brussels? Are your uncle and cousins kind to you?"

He could not resist asking the question. Ina looked up, startled, and hot tears rushed to her eyes.

"Oh, yes!—they could not be kinder. I love them all dearly."

"Ah, I am glad to hear that. But you don't look like the Mignonette of old days. I should hardly have recognized you but for your curls. What is the matter, my dear?"

Ina turned away her face.

"I am tired, I believe," she said. "And I have a headache. I did not know I was altered."

Mr. Percival was silent, but she felt his eyes upon her, and she felt too that she must make an effort for more self-control. Glancing up with a forced smile, she asked how his sister was.

"Very well," replied Mr. Percival gravely. "Mignonette, it was not your custom in old days to shed tears because you were tired."

The tears threatened to come in an uncontrollable flood, and for a moment she could not speak. Mr. Percival looked really concerned.

"My dear girl, you must treat me like the old friend that I am. Will you tell me what is wrong, and let me see if I cannot rectify it?"

"Oh, no,—please don't ask," said Ina, struggling to speak steadily. "Indeed it is nothing,—I mean, it is nobody's fault,—I only heard something said—by accident,—please don't speak about it to any one. I am only—only teased."

"Well, I will try to believe you," said Mr. Percival dubiously. "I suppose I must not ask what the something is. Perhaps another day I shall find you more like yourself,—for I do not mean this to be our last meeting."

A sudden consciousness that it must be growing late flashed into Ina's mind. "Could you tell me what o'clock it is, Mr. Percival?"

He drew out his watch, and showed it to her. The hands pointed to a quarter past five, and in dismay Ina started up.

"Oh, how could I stay so long? What will they think of me? They were to dine at half-past five, and I have been away most of the afternoon."

"Never mind,—I will come and make your excuses," said Mr. Percival, smiling, and offering her his arm. "This is rather a rough path, is it not?"

Ina's answer was indistinct, and she was again sinking into a sorrowful muse, when he remarked cheerfully,—

"Come, I want to know more about yourself. How is it that you so seldom write to us?"

"I don't often know where your address is, Mr. Percival."

"Ah, to be sure,—we are always on the wing to some new place. I went to Brussels only one week after you left it, and found poor Madame quite overwhelmed at having lost her Mignonne. She wept with grief for herself, and laughed with joy for you, in the same breath."

"Poor Madame!" murmured Ina.

"And you say you are fond of your uncle, Mignonette?"

"Very," said Ina. Then, conscious of her dejected tone, she added,—"He could not be kinder. He treats me in every way just as he does Annie. I love him more than I can tell."

"Annie! is she your cousin?"

"Yes,—she is my age. We call ourselves sisters."

"That is very nice. And the boys—there are several, are there not?"

"Three. Aubrey and Cyril and Guy."

"And are they adopted brothers?"

"Yes,—they seem just like it," said Ina, rather faintly, as again the idea flashed across her—"What would they feel, if they knew all?"

"I am sure you are not only tired, but unwell also," remarked Mr. Percival suddenly.

"Oh, no,—I am quite well," said Ina, again endeavouring to throw off the weight which oppressed her.

"Are we far now from the house? It seems to me as if we were approaching the sea again!"

Ina glanced up, and saw the unmistakable glitter of blue through the slender trunks of the saplings which here grew thickly together.

"We must have made a wrong turning," she said, rather dismayed. "I think that little path seems to turn off in the right direction. How stupid of me to be so careless."

The fear of being late for dinner made her hurry on with nervous speed. Mrs. Hardwicke's warning "not to lose her way" now recurred to her mind. Her only fear, however, was lest her absence should appear rude, and Alison should be anxious. She had a general idea of the direction in which the house lay, and with care, soon found herself in a familiar path. Then she heard her name called, and in another moment Marcus stood before her.

"Ina! What can you possibly have been about?" he inquired, with a gravity which was not decreased by the sight of her companion.

A burning red flushed Ina's pale cheek.

"I forgot how time was passing," she said. "And then Mr. Percival came,—and we lost our way. I am very sorry. Marcus,—this is Mr. Percival,—who was so kind to me in Brussels. My cousin,—Mr. Winnington."

Marcus remembered the name, and responded to Mr. Percival's bow. Then he turned again to Ina,—

"I think you had better come on quickly," he said more kindly, though still not as if entirely pleased.

"It is past the dinner-hour, and every one is waiting or looking for you. Alison and Mrs. Hardwicke have been quite alarmed, and Mrs. Williams has just come back from searching in the plantation."

"I am very sorry," was all Ina had power to say.

"You must allow me to bear part of the blame," interposed Mr. Percival. "I wandered into the grounds, not knowing they were private property, and found Mignonette near the edge of the cliff. I kept her there when she wished to return, and as we walked back I talked to her so that she forgot the way, and we took a wrong turning."

Marcus was spared the necessity of answering, as they were almost close to the house. The croquet-party had disappeared, but Mr. and Mrs. Hardwicke, Mrs. Williams and Alison, were waiting with evident anxiety. Mr. Percival did not ask Ina to introduce him, but retaining her trembling hand upon his arm, he walked straight up to the group, with a quick,—

"Hardwicke, I have come to beg pardon for the Mignonette's lengthened absence. I came into your grounds by accident, found her, and detained her. Do you know who I am?"

"Percival! No!" exclaimed Mr. Hardwicke, and the next moment Ina saw herself as completely

forgotten by him as if she had been a hundred miles away. Not so by the ladies. Mrs. Hardwicke was called forward by her husband, to be introduced to his old friend, but Mrs. Williams and Alison together questioned Ina concerning her strange absence,—the former curiously, the latter as gravely as Marcus had done.

"Is this the Mr. Percival who was so kind to you in Brussels?" inquired Alison in a low tone.

"Yes, and I did not even know he was in England," replied Ina. "He found me quite by accident. And I had no idea how time was going until he had been with me some time—some minutes I mean."

"Was he long with you, my dear?" asked Mrs. Williams.

"I don't know. Not very,"—and Ina's voice shook uncontrollably.

"You are quite tired out with the excitement of seeing him," said Mrs. Williams kindly, laying both her hands on Ina's shoulders, and looking into the downcast face,—white and harassed, but with two red spots in the cheeks. "Is he a very great friend of yours?"

"He was always very kind to me," replied Ina, longing intensely for silence, and dreading every moment to break down.

"She doesn't speak very warmly, does she, Mrs. Winnington? Do you know I am very angry with you, Ina, for giving me so little of your company. But I must forgive you in consideration of your old friend. My dear, you can't be very strong if a ramble of two hours or so knocks you up like this. But come,—you must take off your hat, and smooth your hair, for dinner is waiting."

Ina obeyed listlessly. At dinner-time not Mr. Percival alone, but Alison and Mrs. Williams and Marcus all noticed and wondered at the change in her face. With the exception, however, of Mr. Percival, they all ascribed it to her meeting with him, the excitement of seeing an old friend, and the memories aroused by it of her home in Brussels. Mr. Percival alone knew that there was some other reason, and wondered still,—notwithstanding all she had said,—whether she had found Rockstone less happy than she had expected. Ina could eat hardly anything. She managed to swallow sufficient to save appearances, but more was impossible, and Mrs. Williams was quite concerned at her poor appetite. It was a great relief when the meal was over,—still more when the time came to return home. Mr. Percival, who had been persuaded to remain, not only to dinner but for the whole evening, said good-bye very kindly,

expressing his hope of soon seeing her again. Mrs. Williams was to leave on the following day, but she told Ina to be sure and write to her, and not to tire herself out by any more long rambles, as she was evidently far from strong. The Hardwickes shook hands, with many wishes that she should soon recover from her fatigue, and then the little basket carriage drove away.

It was a more silent drive than that of the morning. Marcus was perplexed, if not displeased, with Ina's conduct that day, and though he made an occasional remark, she was in no mood for conversation. They reached the Rectory, and he helped Alison and the little boys out, but Ina found that he was about to drive her the rest of the way. In vain she begged to walk up the hill. If she were so tired, he said, she was certainly unfit for any more fatigue, and in two minutes they were again off.

CHAPTER XV.

"Dost thou love pictures?"—SHAKSPEARE.

"WELL, Mignonette, have you had a pleasant day?" cried Guy, as Ina entered the drawing-room with Marcus. "Why, where's Cyril? He went down to meet you and walk up with you."

"Ina was tired, so I drove her up the hill," said Marcus. "Cyril is in the hall, I believe. We met him at the bottom of the hill, and took him up."

"What a pity I didn't go!" laughed Guy. "I had no idea a drive gratis was in prospect. Mignonette, you don't look as if you had had a particularly enlivening visit."

"She is tired," said Antonia, passing her arm round her cousin's waist. "You look quite pale, darling. Have you a headache? Oh, I am so sorry. Come upstairs, and take off your things, and rest."

Gladly Ina consented. She was only too willing to escape further remarks and questioning. Lady Isabelle observed after her departure with some anxiety,—

"I hope she has not been standing about too much in the hot sun."

"I hardly think the April sun can have much power to harm," said Marcus. "I fancy she is more tired with excitement than anything else."

"I have been half afraid that the sight of Mrs. Williams, as connected with her daughter, might recall Brussels memories rather too vividly," said Aubrey.

"It is not Mrs. Williams alone. Ina disappeared soon after lunch for a solitary ramble in the garden, meaning to stay away only half an hour, I imagine. Instead of that we saw nothing more of her until half-past five, and when she came back she had a gentleman with her,—Mr. Percival."

"What!—the Mr. Percival who undertook her school expenses at Brussels?" exclaimed Aubrey.

"It is her old Brussels friend. I do not remember about the school expenses."

"Two in one day! Rather desperate!" Aubrey remarked. "I hope they will not put it into her head to run away from us."

"No fear of such a thing from Mrs. Williams,"

Marcus said, with a slight emphasis upon the name.

"Do you think there is from Mr. Percival?" inquired Mr. Vincent, who had hitherto listened in silence.

"Not that I am aware of,—but I certainly could not quite understand Ina. She looked quite ill and agitated when she came back just before dinner, had evidently been crying a great deal, and could eat scarcely anything."

"Poor child!" Mr. Vincent remarked compassionately. "She has fitted in so easily, and always seems so bright, that one forgets she must regret the friends she has left. I should like some day to take her to Brussels."

"Do you not think that would make her feel the separation more?" asked Marcus.

"No, I imagine not. She would enjoy meeting her old friends again, and yet would feel this to be *home* when she returned. Some day I should like to try the experiment. But she was anything but depressed this morning before she left."

"She was in the highest spirits," said Marcus. "That made me notice it more particularly. I have never seen her look better and happier than she did, until that unfortunate meeting with Mr. Percival. At

first I was quite vexed with her for remaining away so long, for it was hardly polite, but I feel now it was so unlike Ina to do so that she must have had some strong inducement. Or rather that her thoughts were so taken up as to make her forget the time."

"I never should have suspected Ina of a breach of politeness," said Aubrey. "But she certainly does not look as if her day had been all that she expected."

"No, and yet Mrs. Williams was as kind to her as possible, and Ina seemed enjoying herself most thoroughly the first part of the day. I must not remain now, as it is late and the pony is tired, but I hope she will be quite herself again to-morrow."

He had hardly taken his departure when Antonia came downstairs, looking rather frightened.

"Grandmamma, I am afraid something is wrong. Ina won't say what it is, but she is crying dreadfully, and can't stop herself."

"She has seen Mr. Percival," said Guy.

"Mr. Percival! Her old friend—from Brussels?" exclaimed Antonia, greatly dismayed. "Oh! do you think he has said anything—that he thinks uncle Everard would not have liked her to live here?"

Blank looks answered the suggestion which did

not at the moment seem improbable. Then Mr. Vincent said decidedly,—

"No, I cannot imagine that he would do such a thing, Annie. He would not be so unkind to the poor girl. Shall I come and see her?"

"No, leave her to me, Horace," said Lady Isabelle, rising. "Very likely she is only excited and overdone, and if so a little sal-volatile will be the best cure."

She hastened upstairs, followed by Antonia in a state of much distress. They found Ina still in her low white easy-chair, her face hidden in her hands, which rested on one of the arms, and her slender bent figure shaking with low convulsive sobs. Lady Isabelle walked up, and with gentle decision raised the bowed head, inquiring,—

"Ina, what is the reason of this? Has anything distressed you?"

The face was hidden again, and Lady Isabelle could not have kept it up without more force than she cared to use. "Oh, don't ask me!—it is of no consequence," gasped Ina. "Please leave me,—I will stop directly. Indeed, indeed I could not help it,"—and the sobs, which for a moment had half ceased, returned with hysterical violence.

"You must either tell me the reason, or stop at

once, Ina. You are quite frightening Annie, and making her cry."

But it was so evidently out of her power to stop, that Lady Isabelle went for some water, signing to Antonia to keep off, as her tearful caresses only made Ina worse. A wet sponge on her face helped to check the sobbing, and after swallowing a little sal-volatile she sat up, though her breath still came in sharp irregular catches.

"You are better now," Lady Isabelle said gravely. "Annie will help you to undress and get into bed, for I dare say you would prefer not to come down-stairs again. Your best plan is to go to sleep as fast as possible. Will you tell me now what has distressed you so?" But she saw it would not do to press the question, and added quickly,—"Never mind, if you prefer not talking to-night. Only you must not give way again to tears, Ina."

"I will not," Ina said in a low tone, rising from her seat. "I am sorry to have troubled you, grandmamma."

She hardly spoke again until she was in bed. Lady Isabelle left her for a short time, but she returned to bend over her, and say with unusual gentleness,—

"Will it pain you to answer one question, Ina?

I want to know, for Annie's sake, whether Mr. Percival has been advising you to return to Brussels?"

"Oh, no," said Ina, evidently surprised. "He would not think of such a thing."

"That is right. I was afraid he might have said something of the kind."

"Oh, no,—it is not that. I am only—only stupid. Please forgive me, grandmamma."

A warm kiss was bestowed on her flushed cheek, and then Lady Isabelle went to Antonia, who had just left the room, to inform her that her fears were groundless. There was no doubt that Ina was simply overwrought, and that a good night's rest would restore her.

Ina's appearance next morning served to confirm this opinion. She had not had a very good night's rest, but she was determined to give way no more to outward demonstration of feeling, and except that she looked somewhat pale and grave her manner was much the same as usual. No one now felt any doubt that her crying had been caused by mere nervous fatigue, and no questions were asked. Even the subject of yesterday's excursion was tacitly avoided, but Ina saw that they were curious, and she forced herself to speak upon it with composure. Guy was especially anxious to know what Mr. Per-

cival was like, and inquired with pretended alarm whether he was likely to rival them in her good opinion.

"Oh, no, don't be afraid," said Ina, smiling,—though her smile this morning had lost half its usual brightness. "He is not like uncle Horace,—but he is very nice and kind."

"Is that comparison meant to be complimentary or disparaging to myself, Mignonette?" inquired Mr. Vincent.

"Not disparaging, uncle! I should not have dared to say it, if I had meant that."

"Do you think you will see him again?" asked Antonia.

"He said he meant to come and see me."

"We must ask him to sleep here," said Lady Isabelle. "Did he give you his address?"

"He told me they were in a farmhouse,—in some village. Oh, I think it is in Tanglepool. But I don't know his address. Mr. Hardwicke would,—if we do not hear from him soon."

"We will find out before long," said Mr. Vincent, rising. "I should like him to see something of you, and you of him."

The little party left the breakfast-table, and broke up, immediately afterwards. Josephine arrived and

occupied the girls, while the boys hurried away to the "end-room," as it was called, at the conclusion of a long passage, to prepare for the arrival of Mr. Davies.

Late in the afternoon of the same day, when the boys' master and the girls' governess had both taken their departure, Ina came into the same "end-room," where Aubrey was reading alone, with the question,—

"May I write some Greek for you this afternoon, Aubrey?"

"I tell her she does not look fit for it," said Antonia, following her cousin. "But she is not to be managed."

"Except by my refusing to dictate to her," said Aubrey. "I am growing independent now, Mignonette, and find I can scrawl Greek as well as English. Don't you call that writing splendid? It is the work of my right hand."

"You have quite two distinct handwritings," said Ina. "I don't think I am so glad as I ought to be, that you can write again, Aubrey. I have quite enjoyed our Greek together."

"I'll give you a lesson in the language as often as you like, but I don't mean you to have the drudgery of acting as my amanuensis any longer. How warm the weather still is! I always say this room is the hottest in the house."

Ina was silently examining a drawing that lay on the table. "Is this yours, Aubrey?"

"No, Cyril's. Cleverly done, is it not? You know the original of course."

Ina shook her head, and he pulled from a half-shut drawer a pretty soft picture, representing a large and beautiful country house.

"I ought not to call this the original, for grandmamma drew it first, and this is lithographed from her drawing. Cyril's is copied from this."

"What place is it?" asked Ina.

"You don't mean to say you don't know? Why, Knightstone Wood Mansion, to be sure. It belonged to papa before Annie was born. A splendid place it must have been."

Ina was bending a very white face over the drawing, and for a minute or too she could see nothing. Then she raised her head, determined not to lose this opportunity of asking one or two questions.

"Aubrey, you don't remember that time, do you?"

"Before we came to live here? Oh, no! I was hardly three years old. I fancy I can dimly recollect a large lawn, and an avenue of trees, which I used to race up and down, but that is all."

"This seems so thoroughly our home now," An-

tonia remarked. "I can hardly believe that in old days it was only used for six weeks every summer."

"It is a nice home too," said Aubrey. "Not that I should object to the other,—but I dare say we are just as happy without it."

"The *two* others, you might say," observed Antonia, smiling. "Papa had a large house in London as well, you know, Mignonette."

"I have heard—," Ina said in a low voice.

"Here are some more pictures of Knightstone Wood," said Aubrey, pulling other sketches out of the drawer. "They were put here years ago, I believe, because grandmamma could not bear to see them. Poor granny! it must have been hard to leave the home in which she had lived ever since her marriage. I think it is wonderful how happy she is now."

"After living sixteen years here, this ought to be something of a home," remarked Antonia. "But then of course she always had grandpapa in the other house, until a few months before she had to leave it."

"Look here, Mignonette!" and Aubrey spread the sheets on the table. "This is the avenue that I fancy I can remember. Beautiful trees, are they not? And this is the back of the house. Here is a view

of the church, and a little bit of the house coming in at one corner."

"Did grandmamma draw these?" asked Ina, while flush after flush passed over her cheeks. Oh, how little they knew,—how little they guessed *who* was the cause of their having lost so much. She felt almost impelled to say something that would reveal the truth.

"All of them,—at least these are lithographs from her sketches. The originals were all given away. But she has never touched a pencil since she left Knightstone Wood."

"Did she feel it so very much?"

"Very much. And I hardly wonder. She married very young, and from that time until after grandpapa's death it was her home. But I fancy she thinks less about it now."

Another question Ina longed to ask. Could she venture to trust her voice? Huskily she inquired at length,—

"Was it a sudden thing—your having to live here?"

"I believe so. Not that I know much about it. Curiously enough papa has never told me any particulars. I always fancy it is on grandmamma's account that the subject has been so rarely mentioned before us. Of course if papa wishes us not to know

more, I should not like to try and find out anything. It was chiefly through the failure of some bank, I have heard, but that can hardly be all, or papa would never mind our hearing it."

"No, I should think not," said Ina, so quietly as to surprise herself.

"However, I don't think it is of much consequence," said Aubrey with a light-hearted laugh. "Perhaps there was some carelessness on somebody's part, that papa thinks best not talked about. Once too I heard it said that grandpapa speculated, and left his affairs in something of a mess, and I dare say grandmamma would not like us to hear all about that. Anyhow the money went, and we are not likely to have it back. It is of very little consequence now in what *way* it went."

Oh, how Ina wished that she could have echoed his words. She could not talk any more on the subject, and she felt glad when the pictures were again out of sight. To appear entirely like her usual self was out of her power, but she was sufficiently cheerful for them still to ascribe her paleness to the excitement of the previous day.

On the following morning a letter arrived from Mr. Percival, addressed to Ina, and Mr. Vincent handed it to her across the breakfast-table, rather surprised at the

quiet manner in which it was received. A minute or two later they all rose from their seats, just as Ina exclaimed,—

"Oh, they want me to go and see them, grandmamma. There is a long message for you from Miss Percival. They want Annie and me to spend a week with them."

She handed the letter to Lady Isabelle, as she spoke. The boys who were hurrying away did not hear her remark, but Mr. Vincent observed with a smile,—

"Ah, he wants to see if his little Mignonette has creditable relations!"

"Oh, uncle,—as if he did not know that. But if I go, may Annie come with me?"

Antonia's looks were entreating. Mr. Vincent seemed a little amused.

"Don't you think you would enjoy your old friends more alone, Mignonette?"

"I never thoroughly enjoy anything now, uncle, unless Annie is with me. Please let her go too. It would be a nice little change for her."

"Very kind of Mr. Percival and his sister," remarked Lady Isabelle, laying down the letter. "I certainly should like it for Annie. She so seldom has the advantage of any change."

"But how are we to get on without both of you for a whole week?" asked Mr. Vincent gravely. "Grandmamma will feel as if she had lost both her hands."

"Then Ina is the right and I am the left," said Antonia, while Ina looked up, her face flushing with eagerness.

"Oh, uncle Horace, if you really think I am of any use, I should so like to stay at home. And Annie could go without me."

"My dear, what would Mr. Percival say to such a proposal?"

"He would not mind. I should not care much what he said. If I could do anything, —I should so love to do *anything* for you!" Ina said, with her eyes full and her voice unsteady.

Lady Isabelle looked half perplexed, half touched, and said nothing. Mr. Vincent, though kind and affectionate, was not usually demonstrative, but he took her face between his hands, and kissed it more than once.

"My dear Mignonette, I should be sorry indeed to exact such self-denial on your part."

"It would not be self-denial. If I only might," pleaded Ina. "I want nothing so

much as to be of *any* use to you and grandmamma."

"You are of a great deal more use than you know. Come, you must not look at me like that. You are making us all feel quite unhappy, without the slightest reason. I did not intend making any real objection to your leaving home with Annie. We shall miss you both, but we shall be delighted for you to have the pleasure."

"It will do them both good," added Lady Isabelle. "I fancy they both want a change, and they work so regularly that a week's holiday will do them no harm. Wednesday he asks them to go. You must write back, Ina,—and, Horace, will you enclose a note to Mr. Percival?"

"I thought of doing so. I must thank him for including Annie in his invitation."

"I see Josephine coming through the garden, so you had better go," said Lady Isabelle to the girls, and when they had quitted the room, she remarked,—"I really am more perplexed than ever about Ina. She is the sweetest and most incomprehensible girl I ever saw. What could have been the cause of that sudden excitement? It seemed half-ridiculous, and yet the mere sight of her face at that moment positively almost overcame me."

"I don't wonder, mother. Poor child! However, I still attribute that nervously excitable manner to her meeting with Mr. Percival. She has not looked thoroughly like herself since. A quiet week spent with him will, I doubt not, prove the best possible restorative."

CHAPTER XVI.

" Hast thou some secret woe,
That thus thou speakest?"
HEMANS.

TANGLEPOOL was a quiet little village, situated some two or three miles inland. The farmhouse, in which Mr. and Miss Percival were for a time residing, stood apart, and though on one side it was bounded by kitchen-garden, poultry-yard, pig-styes, and other indispensable farmhouse adjuncts, on the other was to be found a very pretty green lawn, surrounded by a gravel-path, and dotted here and there with small flower-beds. Upon this lawn stood Mr. Percival, with his two young guests, on the afternoon of the day succeeding their arrival. His sister, who was considerably older than himself, sat working in a small summer-house close at hand.

Croquet-hoops were arranged upon the grass, and

four balls lay scattered in different directions. The weather was less hot than it had been, but it was still very warm for the month of April. Antonia had a bright colour in her cheeks, and was evidently enjoying herself most thoroughly. Ina smiled, and talked, and threw herself into the game with *almost* her usual spirit. Not quite. Mr. Percival could detect an under-current of grave and even sad thought, which he did not like to see, while it was evident at times that her attention was somewhat forced.

"Now, Mignonette, it is your turn," cried Antonia, who was playing with Mr. Percival against Ina. "Do have a little pity upon me. I had no intention of leaving my poor ball so near one of yours."

"Well aimed, Mignonette!" exclaimed Mr. Percival, whose sympathies appeared pretty equally divided between friend and foe. "Ah, Miss Vincent, you must not calculate on pity from an enemy. You are going to be croqueted, I perceive. Are you a good hand at it, Mignonette?"

Ina answered by placing her foot on her own ball, raising her mallet, and despatching the unfortunate red ball on a voyage of discovery to the farthest corner of the lawn.

"It is too bad," said Antonia. "And I croquet so badly that I can't return the compliment. I am always afraid of hitting my foot."

"Here comes tea," Miss Percival called out from the summer-house, and laying down her work she advanced towards them. "You will not have time to finish your game now."

"Hardly," said Mr. Percival, glancing round. "What think you, Mignonette? It will take us more than half an hour."

"It is half-past five already," said Miss Percival. "And the grass will soon be growing damp. If you finish your game we must go indoors to tea."

"Oh, please let us have tea in the summer-house," said Ina, reading the wish in Antonia's face. "It will be so much the pleasantest. And we can have another game to-morrow."

Mr. Percival threw down his mallet with a nod of assent. "It is too much to last," he remarked. "Tea out of doors in April! We shall pay for this by and by. I should not be surprised if we had frost and snow again before June."

"Oh, I hope not. Don't foretell anything so bad," exclaimed Antonia. "I like to feel that summer has come on."

"This is only a taste of summer,—not summer

itself. But come and sit down, young ladies, and make yourselves comfortable. I have been wanting to ask you a question, Miss Vincent, about your brother who brought you here on Saturday. Is he the eldest, and is his name Cecil?"

"No,—but please don't call me Miss Vincent. He is my second brother, Cyril."

"Not the one who injured his hand?"

"Oh, no,—Aubrey is a year and a half older than Cyril, and very different-looking."

There was rather an amused expression about Mr. Percival's mouth.

"May I ask whether the comparison is complimentary or otherwise to Master Cyril?"

Antonia blushed, and Ina said quickly,—"Oh, Mr. Percival, that is too bad. Annie only meant that they were very unlike. Aubrey is taller and handsomer, and looks much older. But Cyril is such a good kind boy, and clever too."

"So one is tall and handsome, and the other good and kind," said Mr. Percival rather quizzically. "I think I prefer the latter description."

"But Aubrey is both," laughed Ina. "Every one likes him,—only Cyril is so quiet that he is not so often well known."

"Ah,—I see. He is older than you, is he not?

I should never have thought it, for he scarcely looks fifteen years old. To tell the truth, however, I rather took a fancy to his face."

Antonia was so uncertain whether he spoke in jest or earnest, that she inquired,—"Do you really mean it?"

"Certainly. You are like the Mignonette of old days. She always fancied I was in fun. It is an unfortunate way of speaking that I have."

"Oh, Mr. Percival, I wish you would tell me about Mignonette in old days. What was she like when you first saw her?"

"Eight years ago! Well, she was rather a nice little thing. On the whole we decided that she was worth taking care of."

"I should think so! And was she like what she is now?"

Mr. Percival looked attentively at Ina.

"Really I don't quite know. She was very like the Mignonette that I saw last at Brussels. But I don't know what has come over her since then. She has altered somehow,—in expression, I think."

"I am growing older," said Ina quietly.

"Ay, but that is no reason for your altering more in one year than you did before in seven," said Mr. Percival. "Some more tea, Mignonette?"

Antonia felt greatly inclined to say,—"I think

she has altered only since her meeting with you the other day, Mr. Percival,"—but she would not do so in Ina's presence. Before she had quite made up her mind whether to speak or not, he recurred to the subject of Cyril, who had the day before accompanied the girls to Tanglepool, Mr. Vincent being elsewhere engaged.

"Is he not the lad who was nearly killed in babyhood by the misconduct of some servant? I forget who told me the story, but I know they said it was the second boy."

"It was Cyril," said Antonia. "He has never quite recovered it. Six months ago he would never go anywhere alone in the dark. But I think now he is conquering the feeling."

"I am glad to hear it—very glad," said Mr. Percival heartily. "Nothing is a greater disadvantage to a young man than timidity."

"It was not his fault," said Ina, fearing Antonia might be hurt. "He really could not help being afraid. It was quite by accident that he found he might get over it. When Aubrey hurt himself last November, Cyril was sent to call for help, and I suppose the knowledge that Aubrey might die, if something were not done quickly, kept him from thinking about himself."

"But, Mignonette," Antonia could not help saying, "Cyril told me himself that he could not have done it then, if he had not already been struggling against the feeling. He said it was you who had persuaded him and helped him."

"I may once or twice have said a few words," replied Ina quietly, "but it was all his own doing."

"And he is really getting over the weakness?" said Mr. Percival. "I honour the lad for it. I believe few things are more difficult to overcome. As to the servant who caused it—wilfully, I was told,—I cannot speak strongly enough against her shameful conduct."

"It was very wrong," said Antonia. "No one knew anything about it at the time, until the mischief was done. She seemed a quiet industrious person, and Cyril was always clinging to her."

"Ay, no doubt,—she taught him to do so of course. It is wonderful how little parents *do* know of their nurses. And in fact it is difficult in some cases to say how they are to know more, unless the mothers positively live in the nursery."

"One only has to walk through London, or any large town, to see how rare a really good nurse is," remarked Miss Percival. "I can't look on without indignation at the way in which dozens of poor little

children are treated,—pulled and pushed about; scolded when there is no reason; left alone in their perambulators, exposed to the hot sun or the cold wind; and sometimes turned fairly over upon the flags. I believe the ill-health and even the death of many a child might be traced to its careless nurse."

"But Cyril's nursemaid was worse than careless," said Ina. "She used to frighten him quite systematically, by dressing up ugly figures, leaving him alone in the dark, and telling him frightful stories of things that would happen to him, if he dared to move or cry out. He can hardly bear to speak of it even now,—the impression left on his mind is so strong."

"Perfectly abominable!" exclaimed Mr. Percival. "Even worse than I imagined. Really one can hardly wonder at any amount of cowardice, or nervousness, after such treatment."

"No, so papa has always felt," said Antonia. "But we hope that as it has never been fought with, he will in time get quite over it. I don't mean that we expect he will lose the nervous feeling, but that he will be able to keep it down, and not to give way."

"Why, yes, that is all you must look for at present. If once he has begun to improve, he will go on. But don't mention the servant to me again. I can't speak or hear of her with patience."

He turned the subject to that of proposed drives and excursions during the following week. Several were decided upon, and a plan of proceedings was drawn roughly out. But, alas for their expectations! A cold east wind set in on the following day, rendering both drives and excursions out of the question. Even croquet had to be laid aside. Antonia was always somewhat of a prisoner with spring winds, and neither Mr. Percival nor Ina cared to undertake amusements in which she could not share.

Notwithstanding this little disappointment regarding the weather, they spent a very enjoyable week. Ina looked quite herself again at the end of it, though beneath all her cheerful words and smiles there lay a weight at her heart that was never lightened. Many times her pillow was wet with tears, as she thought over the words which she had accidentally heard. The day with the Hardwickes began to seem almost like some troubled dream, and she would hardly have believed her own memory, but for the unmistakable evidence of Mr. Percival's presence. Her meeting with him was certainly no dream, therefore she could not persuade herself that other events in connection with it had happened in a dream either.

The last day of their stay arrived. It was warmer again, and in the afternoon,—Ina being occupied in

learning some new and mysterious fancy-work from Miss Percival,—Mr. Percival made Antonia wrap up warmly, and took her for a little walk, as she had not been out for two days.

"The wind is easterly still, but not cold enough to hurt you," he said, as they started. "I have no faith in too much shutting up. Only you must tell me when you are tired. I am apt to walk on and on, without remembering that my companion's powers may be less than my own."

"You are very kind to take me out at all," said Antonia, smiling. "Mr. Percival, I can't thank you enough for our pleasant week here."

"Pleasant! Why all the enjoyment has been on our side, I think," said Mr. Percival.

"Oh, no, indeed,—I have enjoyed it so much. And I am sure Mignonette is better for the change."

"I wish I could have kept you both longer," said Mr. Percival. "But you know we shall be leaving Tanglepool ourselves in three days. I am so vexed that we cannot remain some weeks as we first intended. However, I shall hope to come again at some future time. Yes, I think Mignonette is better, —less pale, and more cheerful. I did not at all like her looks at first."

"She was not like herself then, Mr. Percival. It

was ever since that day when she first saw you, that we noticed a change,—and we thought the excitement had been a little too much for her."

Mr. Percival raised his eyebrows with a look of undisguised amazement.

"Not like herself! Ever since seeing me! Excitement too much for her! Not pleasurable excitement surely!"

"Oh, yes," said Antonia quickly, "people are often made ill with too much pleasure."

"Ill!—yes. But not unhappy and depressed. Pleasure does not take away a person's spirits. Besides, I don't understand. When I found her on the cliff she appeared anything but well or cheerful."

It was Antonia's turn to look astonished.

"Did she? When you found her? Then it could not have been the meeting with you that made her cry?"

"It could hardly have made her cry before she saw me, certainly."

"No,—but after she came home!"

"What, did she cry then too? Poor child!"

"I only saw her do it once, Mr. Percival. Please tell me all about it,"—and Antonia really looked anxious.

"Yes, yes,—in a minute. But just say first,

—did she seem distressed when she reached home?"

"I never saw her cry so much before," said Antonia, hardly able to control her voice at the recollection. "But she did not seem able to give any reason, so we thought she was only over-excited. At first we fancied you might have been advising her to go back to Brussels, or something of the kind, but we asked her,—at least grandmamma did,—and she said it was not that."

"I should think not! And her distress was certainly caused by no excitement at seeing me. She took it so quietly that I should have been almost hurt, only I saw something was worrying her."

"How did you find her, Mr. Percival?"

"I'll tell you exactly, only you must not get me into a scrape with her, for she asked me not to mention it to any one. My sister and I had arrived here the day before, and I was taking a walk. I knew my friend Hardwicke lived somewhere near, but I had no intention of seeing him just then, as I thought his house was farther off. However I strayed accidentally into his grounds, by climbing over a paling, which I imagined to enclose only some kind of public wood or shrubbery. Presently I found myself close to the cliff, and in another minute I saw a

young lady sitting on a stone, with her hat at her feet, and her hair blown all over her face and hands. I remember the idea flashing through my mind that her curls had just that golden look which is so pretty in la Mignonne's, but I never dreamt of finding her in such a situation, and I meant to pass quietly on, when she heard me and started up."

"And was she—how did she look?"

"So pale and sad that I did not recognise her in the least. She had evidently been shedding a great many tears, and it was not till I asked her some question about my way, and heard her voice, that I knew her again. Even then I could hardly believe the evidence of my senses."

"It is very strange," said Antonia thoughtfully. "Was she pleased to see you?"

"Pleased, but not in her old joyous way. I asked her what was wrong, and she said she was tired. Then I said that it had not been her custom in Brussels to cry about fatigue, and that very nearly upset her again, but after a minute she said it was nothing,—that she had heard something said by accident which had teased her, but it was nobody's fault, and I was not to ask her any more, and not to tell any one how I had found her."

"Had heard something said!" repeated Antonia. "What could it have been?"

"There I am at fault. If you can find out, and comfort her, so much the better. Poor Mignonette! I dare say it was some thoughtless saying, not meant for her to hear. It seems hard that a poor orphan girl like her cannot escape unkind remarks."

"But how could it be? What *could* any one say unkindly of Mignonette?"

"I can't tell," returned Mr. Percival, with a shake of his head. "There is no knowing what some people are capable of. There may have been nonsense talked about her being dependent upon your father, for instance."

Antonia's "Oh!" was almost a gasp of indignation.

"Of course! of course! *I* know well enough, Antonia, by this time that you all treat her as one of yourselves. But every one does not know it, and there *are* uncles in the world who would not care to be burdened with stray nieces. I'm not excusing those who made the unkind remark, whatever it was, but only giving you my view of the matter. However, it won't do to suggest the idea to her, by asking if I am right, for it is extremely likely that I am mistaken. And she is more cheerful now, so I hope

she is forgetting the observation that troubled her. I fancy it is almost best now to let it rest."

But Antonia could not rest, without an attempt to discover what was wrong. She had no opportunity until they were in bed together that night. Ina thought she was asleep, and was indulging herself in the sorrowful musings and conjectures, which she was obliged to put aside during the day, when she was a little startled by the words,—

"Mignonette, I want to ask you something. I can hear that you are awake."

"Yes,—I am not asleep yet, but I thought you were. What do you want, dear?"

"I want you to tell me what is worrying you."

The suddenness of the request almost swept away Ina's self-command. She lay perfectly still and silent, but her heart beat wildly, and Antonia felt her hand turn suddenly cold.

"Mignonette, you do not mind my asking, do you?" she inquired, raising herself a little, and leaning over her cousin, though the room was too dark to admit of their seeing one another's faces, beyond a dim outline.

"No,—it is nothing," said Ina faintly. "Annie dear, you ought to go to sleep."

"And you won't tell me?" said Antonia sorrowfully.

"I can't," said Ina with difficulty.

"Was it only something you heard said?"

No answer for a minute, though Ina's cold fingers were clasping her cousin's tightly.

"Mr. Percival told you that," she said at length. "It was unkind of him."

"Oh, no, you must not blame him, Mignonette. We were talking together, and I asked him questions. I only want to know that I may comfort you. Was it anything unkind about you?"

"Oh, no!"

"But there must have been something," gently persisted Antonia. "You don't cry for nothing, Mignonette. And you are crying now. Oh, why won't you let me know what is wrong."

"I can't," Ina said again. "Annie,—it is very kind of you,—but I can't tell you just now. No one was unkind. Please don't ask any more. There is nothing wrong,—in the way that you fancy."

"I fancy something was said behind your back which reached you, and pained you very much. Am I wrong in thinking so?"

Ina could not answer. She gave Antonia a silent but loving kiss, reminded her in a whisper that Lady

Isabelle would not like her to lie awake, and then turned away her head. But it was long before either of them fell asleep, though they did not talk any more. Antonia was almost as unhappy as Ina. Perhaps a little hurt feeling at her cousin's want of confidence mingled with her sympathy,—nor was this surprising, in her ignorance as to the cause of Ina's evident grief.

CHAPTER XVII.

"What deep mystery lurks
Within thy words? What mean'st thou?"

HEMANS.

"I SAY, Mignonette, you seem to have been tremendously busy this afternoon," exclaimed Guy, a day or two after the return home of the girls.

"Writing letters, do you mean?" asked Ina, glancing up from her embroidery. It was a half-holiday, and Aubrey and Cyril were absent on a long walking expedition. "Oh, yes, I have done a good deal since lunch."

"Let me see who you have been favouring," said Guy, with a mischievous glance for permission, "Madame Boucher,—that is a matter of course. Miss Williams!—Mrs. Williams!—Miss Percival!—what a correspondent you are!"

"Mrs. Williams asked me to write to her sometimes, but I have never done it yet. And grand-

mamma said I ought to write to Miss Percival, after spending a week there."

"You look tired with it," said Guy, glancing at her. "Are you not well, Mignonette?"

"Oh, yes," Ina said, smiling a little. "At least —I *am* tired and stupid this afternoon. I don't know why."

"I am afraid your change has not done you much good," said Antonia. "I wish you looked better, Mignonette. Guy, I wanted to ask you why you did not walk out this afternoon with Mr. Davies and Aubrey and Cyril?"

"Because I had other business on hand, ma'am. I went to pay my respects to Master Gordon Halifax."

"I hope he was duly honoured," said Ina.

"Immensely flattered. So much so that he had hardly a word to say. The fact is Cecily lent me a book, and I promised to return it to-day, and as Gordon was at home we all three went on the beach. But Gordon was mum, and Cecily and I talked."

"I suppose he thinks you have rather neglected him lately," said Antonia.

"Cecily thinks so," observed Ina quietly. "She accused me once of having made you forsake Gordon, and begged me to use my influence in bringing you together again."

Guy looked extremely diverted.

"No! did she? What fun! Was that lately?"

"Last Christmas."

Guy sat on the table, whistling, for some minutes, —then laid hands on Ina's open desk.

"Is this yours, Mignonette? What a splendid affair!"

"It is a very handsome one, though it is so old."

"Handsome! I should think it was. You don't often show it down here."

"No, very seldom. I don't know why I brought it to-day."

"I can guess," said Guy demurely. "Just to allow me the exquisite delight of overhauling it."

Ina laughed a little.

"Is that meant for a hint, Guy? You may look at anything you like in the desk,—except this one compartment."

"Is that the receptacle for your *billets doux* and such-like articles?"

Ina could not smile. "No,—papa's letters and papers are there," she said gently.

Guy was silent for a minute, till she looked up with a cheerful,—"I really mean it, Guy. Look at anything else that you like."

He was not slow to avail himself of the permission.

"I suppose I may criticise and inquire as I proceed, Mignonette. Much obliged! What's this? A packet of letters! And all from Madame! Another packet from Miss Mary Williams. And a third—from nobody."

"That is a miscellaneous packet."

"Ah! I see. I won't ask leave to read them all through. What's this?"

"A piece of weeping-willow from Napoleon's grave at St. Helena," said Ina. "Uncle Horace gave it to me."

"Oh, I know. Papa gave me a piece too, but I lost it. I'm no admirer of Napoleon's."

"Nor am I," said Ina quietly. "I value it because uncle gave it to me."

"And what's in this drawer? Rings and brooches! Is this your jewel-box as well as desk?"

"Mr. Percival gave them to me when I was quite little. They are only imitation, and I used to use them for my dolls. I keep them as curiosities, because they came from some great foreign fair."

"And here's another jolly little drawer. What's this? A pebble!"

Ina coloured a little, but laughed.

"Yes, that was the first pebble I picked up at Dover, the minute after landing."

"You romantic young lady! What did papa say?"

"He did not see,—but I should not have minded if he had."

"Well,—there are different ways of being patriotic," said Guy, shaking his head. "And girls can't fight to defend their country, so it is just as well that they should pick up pebbles."

"Only one," said Ina in self-defence. "And I had never seen England before."

"That makes a difference, certainly. Hallo!—here's a magnificent silver pencil-case, wrapped in silver paper, in a cardboard box."

"Mr. Percival gave it to me."

"He seems to have given you no end of things. Why don't you use it?"

"For fear of losing it. Take care, Guy,—you will break something."

"I'm very careful. But it's queer,—I can't make out this part of the desk."

"What is the matter with it?" inquired Antonia.

"Why, look here. There are two nice little

drawers on this side, and a set of little pigeon-holes on the other, and nothing at all in the middle."

"I don't see anything wrong,—do you, Mignonette?" asked Antonia, and Ina shook her head.

"No, I don't know what Guy means."

"Come here, and I'll show you then. It's a first-rate desk, so compact and well-arranged, and there isn't a single waste corner in it, except this. And here, instead of two more drawers, or more pigeon-holes, where there is plenty of room, nothing is to be seen but a blank piece of wood. Are you sure there is no way of opening it?"

Ina laughed at the idea.

"Oh, no,—how could there be? There is nothing to open."

Guy did not look satisfied, and she remained by his side, while he examined, pulled, pushed, and exclaimed at the futility of his efforts—

"Stupid thing! I'm certain there must be something behind."

"Indeed, I think you are mistaken, Guy. I never—"

At that moment Guy pulled sharply a slip of wood, placed exactly above, to separate the division for pens and pencils from that for wafers. Instantly a broad piece of mahogany sprang out, disclosing a drawer of

whose existence Ina had never dreamed. She stood in silent bewilderment.

"I thought so," said Guy. "I just remembered seeing a desk with a secret drawer that opened in that very way. Capital discovery, isn't it? Will you peep in, or shall I?"

Ina stepped forward, and pulled it open. Papers lay inside. Her father's writing she saw at once. For a moment she hesitated. Then taking them in her hands, she ran upstairs to her own room, bolted the door, and sat down by the window, trembling with excitement.

The first thing she saw was a blank envelope, enclosing a bank-note for twenty pounds. Hastily laying it on a chair, she took up the next thing,—a closed letter, directed to,—

"Horace Vincent, Esq.,
Rockstone Lodge,
Rockstone Leigh,
———shire,
Angleterre."

What a thrill passed through Ina,—perplexity, wonderment, distress, all mingling together. The address was in her father's hand. But how long ago had it been written? Why had it never been sent to Mr. Vincent? Why left in this drawer? These were questions she could not answer. For a moment

she placed it aside, to examine the remaining papers, but they appeared to be chiefly a few old yellow letters addressed by her mother to himself before their marriage, and two or three of later date, in large childish writing, from herself to her father. Her heart was beating and her head aching too violently with agitation, to admit of her reading them now, and she put them safely away with the bank-note in her pocket-book.

In utter uncertainty what to do, she rose with the sealed envelope in her hand, and walked up and down the room, with rapid steps. But physical pain and mental excitement were too intense to allow of one moment's calm consideration. She only felt that the letter was addressed to her uncle, and to him she must take it. Her father might or might not have wished him to have it. She had no power to decide the question. She could only throw herself on her knees by the bedside, and pray that she might be guided aright. Perhaps a kind of terror of revelations concerning the past, which this would probably draw upon her, was now her strongest sensation,—and yet she felt that she could not consent to forego them, were they offered. For nearly five minutes she knelt, then slowly rose and made her way downstairs, almost clinging to the banisters for support.

Her knock at the study-door was answered by "Come in." She entered at once, though with pale face, dizzy head, and failing limbs. Mr. Vincent came to meet her, looking almost alarmed.

"My dear child, are you ill? What is the matter?"

"Not ill," Ina forced herself to say. "I wanted to speak to you, uncle."

"Come and sit down here," said Mr. Vincent, taking her hand,—and leading her forward as he spoke, he placed her in his deep arm-chair, drawing a chair to her side for himself. "Poor child! you are quite faint. I am sure something is wrong."

Ina turned away her head, unable to meet his kind anxious gaze.

"It was just now," she began, trying to speak steadily. "Guy was looking over my desk. I said he might. He found a secret drawer. I had never known it before. And—"

"Take your time, dear. Don't hurry," said Mr. Vincent, pressing her cold hand soothingly between his own, for he saw that the beating of her heart almost deprived her of utterance. "Secret drawers are very common things in desks. Perhaps you found some little paper in yours that you wish me to see."

Ina could not speak, but she gave him the letter.

The start, with which he read the address and recognized the handwriting, was not to be repressed. Then he looked back gravely at the tremulous flushing face in the arm-chair.

"Ina, dearest, this is from your father to me."

"I know it," she whispered. "Please read it, uncle."

He opened it without delay. Ina leant back in silence, pressing one hand to her side, and watching him intently. His face was averted more and more as he read on, and was half-concealed by his hand, but she could see the changing colour of his forehead, and the trembling of his closed lips. Even when he had finished he did not speak at once, and her suspense became almost unendurable, but no words would pass her lips. At length he turned and bent over her, his whole face full of tender affectionate compassion.

"Mignonette, darling, I am very thankful to have this letter. Words cannot say *how* thankful. It was written the very evening before his death, and contains many particulars which I have often longed to know. I am going to read you some parts. Shall you be very much disappointed if I do not show all of it to you?"

Ina flushed crimson for a moment, and then turned paler than before.

"Uncle, there is something you want to hide from me about papa."

The words escaped her undesignedly—almost unconsciously. He did not immediately reply, and she looked imploringly, as if to beg his pardon, but there was no displeasure in his face.

"What makes you imagine such a thing, Mignonette? Because I wish you not to see the letter?"

"I knew it before," murmured Ina.

"Did you?" and a sudden idea came into his mind. "My dear child, is this what has so weighed upon you lately?"

She moved her lips noiselessly, but he read the answer in her face.

"What do you know, dear? Tell me all, and how you heard it," he said, very gently yet with authority.

"It was that day,—the day we spent at the Hardwickes'. I heard something said—not meant for me to hear—about—about—"

Again her voice failed from actual breathlessness. He soothed her kindly, yet with a frown on his brow that she knew to denote displeasure,—not with herself.

"Uncle, it was not their fault," she said anxiously.

"They did not know I was so near,—they could not guess—"

"What did they say, Ina?"

She hesitated a moment.

"They did not mean me to hear. I don't know whether I ought to repeat it. I would not have listened, but for a minute I could not move or speak. It came so suddenly. It was only something—about —about the way you lost—your fortune."

He heard the words, low as they were spoken, yet even now he hoped there was some mistake. She saw this, and hurriedly added,—

"I know how it was,—that it was *his* fault,— but I don't know any more. And it makes me so miserable to think and wonder how it happened."

"Who did you hear speaking about it?"

"I would rather not tell you, uncle. They had not the very least idea that I was near them. I had been away—and I was quite alone among the trees,— and they passed near, talking."

He did not repeat the question, but only said with a sigh,—"I am very sorry it has happened. I hoped to have kept the knowledge from you."

"Uncle, will you tell me all about it?" asked Ina.

She doubted whether he had heard her. His

hand was laid on her forehead, and passed over her hair with a soft touch, but it was two or three minutes before he spoke again.

"Cannot you be content to leave matters as they are now, Mignonette?"

"I can't be happy to do it," said Ina. "I fancy so many things. I would much rather know all."

"There is no necessity to go very deeply into particulars. Your father and I were great friends from boyhood, though he was several years my senior. I never had another friend that I loved like him. He was gentle, sweet-tempered, obliging, talented,—attractive to the last degree. At the time that he and I married, he was one of the directors in a large London bank. It was about that time, or not long after, that he first began to change, and to lose his bright gay spirits, though I did not then know the reason. Every one believed the bank to be one of the safest in England. The directors themselves alone knew that they were hurrying on to almost certain ruin. Then my father died, and I found his affairs in an unsettled state, requiring many new arrangements to be made. Amongst others I was induced by your father to place a large portion of my capital in the bank."

"Did you know it was not safe?" asked Ina earnestly.

"Not until the crash came,—a few months before Annie was born," he said briefly, evidently desirous to hurry over the narration.

Ina did not look satisfied.

"Was that all, uncle? Was there nothing else? Why did he go abroad?"

"There was blame attached to the managers of the bank. None of them could have stayed in England very well at the time."

"But what was so very wrong?" asked Ina. "Something that Mrs.—that they said would not bear speaking about."

"People often talk of things about which they know nothing, Mignonette. Perhaps she was alluding to what I said just now,—the managers being blamed."

"No,—it was about you she was speaking," said Ina slowly. "What was the wrong done to you, uncle?"

He hesitated a moment, and then said unwillingly,—

"In representing to me the advantage of investing in a bank, which he knew to be insolvent."

"I see," said Ina mournfully. "You are quite sure he knew it?"

"He was one of the directors. They all knew it. I must tell you, dear, that blame attached to me as well as to him, for my want of caution in placing so large an amount of property in a bank about which I really knew so little. But I was very young then, ignorant and thoughtless about money, and in difficulties through my poor father's losses in speculations, just before his death."

"Did grandmamma wish it at the time?" asked Ina.

"The money being placed in that bank? Yes, she was most anxious it should be done."

"Ah,—I don't wonder she felt it so much afterwards," murmured Ina.

"Our losses were a trial to her at the time, even more than to your dear aunt and myself. We grieved over nothing so much, Ina, as our entire separation from your parents. But we lost sight of them completely, and had no means of discovering where they were, or whether our letters reached them. As to your father's silence respecting you, I have only been able to conjecture the cause, but I find from this letter that I am not far wrong. Would you like to read it, dear? Now that you know so much, I would not keep it from you."

Ina took it, and read through blinding tears,—

"My dear Horace,

"I cannot tell what impulse moves me to write to you to-night,—but write I must, before I can lie down and rest. It is not the first time that I have taken pen and paper in hand, with the same intention, only to lay them aside again. But I can no longer delay sending you a few lines, to let you know of my deep and sincere though tardy repentance. Remorse I have suffered for years,—such remorse as you cannot even imagine. But it is only lately that my eyes have been opened to perceive the deep sinfulness of my past conduct,—and to see that even for me there may be pardon and peace, through 'the Lamb, which taketh away the sin of the world.' May I not indeed hope that even to the *chief of sinners* forgiveness will not be denied?

"In now writing to you, I break through a resolution formed long ago,—formed the last time that I saw your face and almost fled from it, crushed and broken-hearted at the thought of the ill I had brought upon you, though you might not have known it from my cold look and hard words. Never, never have I forgotten, and never shall I forget, your forgiving brotherly love,—oh! how far harder to bear than the

direst anger, for it was indeed 'heaping coals of fire upon my head.' I resolved then that you should never again be troubled with me or mine. In my blind pride I fancied it was the only reparation in my power, and I positively rejoiced in the pain that the separation caused me, little realizing that to one,—my poor Fanny,—it was the breaking of heart and spirit.

"Not till she was gone, and I was left with our poor helpless baby, did I know it, and then the truth came upon me with terrible force. I felt bound to write and acquaint you with her death, but I could not tell you that I knew I had been accessory to it,—nor could I speak of her calm peace and trust at the last. Her troubles had drawn her very closely to her Saviour, but at the time I could not understand it. Now I do, and from my heart I thank God for the mercy. I cannot now write particulars concerning her death, for I feel very ill this evening, and I must hasten on with my letter. But if I hear from you I will write again, and send a full account. I dare not expect an answer, for I feel that I do not deserve it. And yet—and yet—I know you too well, my deeply-injured brother, to doubt that I shall receive one, tardy though my pleading for forgiveness has been. Nor is it from you alone, but from your wife and

Lady Isabelle also, that I ask it,—and for myself I ask no more.

"One more thing I must explain, though briefly, for you will be weary of this long letter. I mentioned just now that at Fanny's death she left me a baby,—then only a few weeks old,—now my little Ina, aged eight years. For two years she has been at a school in Brussels. She is in utter ignorance of her relations, as is also her governess,—but when next I see them, they shall both hear the sad story of my life. Many a time have I wondered, with a heart-ache, what would become of her, were I taken, for I have long been out of health. But I feel that when you know about her, she will not be utterly unprotected in the wide world. My sweet motherless child!—you will not blame *her* for the sins and follies of her father! Would that I could give her entirely to you, and I think then I could almost be content never to see her face again,—dearly as I love it. I feel that I am utterly unfitted to train her rightly, and I trust she is in good kind hands,—but not such hands as those of your dear wife and yourself.

"I must not write more now. I could continue unceasingly upon this subject, but I have said enough, —far more than I have any right to say. I will post this to-morrow, and I plead but for one line in answer,

—one line to tell me of your forgiveness, and to assure me that, when I die, my child shall not be left utterly to the mercy of strangers.

"Believe me,

"Your deeply repentant,

"E. MIGNON."

Ina read to the end, though with difficulty. She was completely overcome, and for some minutes her sobs were almost violent. Not entirely sorrowful ones. The relief of knowing her father's last wishes was very great, though at present it was a secondary thought with her. Not even her own father could have soothed her with more loving and untiring kindness, than did Mr. Vincent, until she was able to raise her head, and ask,—

"What does it mean? I can't understand,—why was it not sent off—?"

"I thought I told you, dear. It was written the very evening on which he died. No doubt he placed it in his secret drawer, intending to take it out the next morning."

Ina sighed heavily.

"It seems so strange," she said. "Then if he had lived only one more day—"

"You would have been my child for eight years

instead of one. But it was not the will of God that it should be so, dear. There was no doubt some good reason for our seven years' separation."

"I am glad of one thing," murmured Ina,—"to know that he would have liked me to live here. He wanted it more than anything, you see."

"I am very glad of that. And I am even more thankful, Mignonette," he added in a lower tone,—"for the sweet assurance about him and your dear mother, that they are indeed at *rest* in Jesus."

A little pressure of the fingers that lay in his, showed that he was understood. Presently she said in a faltering voice,—

"I only wish I could do anything for you, uncle Horace. It seems as if I owed you so much,—so very much."

"You owe me nothing but love, dear child, and that you pay me largely. As to doing anything for me,—I will not tell you of all you have done since you came, lest it should put conceit into this little head."

"I wish I could believe I had," whispered Ina.

"I will tell you one thing, Mignonette, for which I can never repay you. That is the change in my poor Annie. If you knew the utter depression and weakness of her state, for months before your arrival,

and the intense anxiety I felt, you would understand what I mean."

"Oh, no,—I did not do anything."

"Nothing in your own strength. That I can well believe. But you gave her all the loving sympathy that was in your power, and with the blessing of God no more was needed. Nothing you can say or do will affect my gratitude. This has not been like the same house, since our Mignonette's arrival."

Ina shook her head, but he was not to be checked.

"As to the boys, I will not try to say what you have done with them. I have not made remarks, but I have seen all that went on, Mignonette. I know who persuaded both Cyril and Guy that weakness, whether moral or physical, might be overcome.. And I know who would have thanked you more than I can do," he added, his voice sinking a little. "Your dear aunt, Ina."

"If I had only known her!"

"Some day you will,—in the better land, where there are no more partings. She was a most beautiful character. At times I fancy I can detect in my Mignonette's thoughtful loving ways a resemblance to her."

"Oh, if there only were,—I should love to be

like her," said Ina, with a sigh. "But I know I am not. Uncle, did *she* feel much your losses?"

"She was far more grieved about your father and mother, dear, than any mere loss of fortune. It was of course a trial to us all at the time, but not such as to affect our happiness."

"Only grandmamma's."

"I think it tried her most of all. After being accustomed all her life to wealth, she missed it a good deal. But whatever feeling of bitterness remained in her mind a year ago, you have conquered it, dear."

Ina could not deny it. She had noticed and rejoiced in Lady Isabelle's increasing kindness of manner. Another thought came into her head.

"Uncle Horace, *they* do not know it,—Annie and the boys."

"No, I have never told them."

"But they must hear it some day. Other people have heard, and it cannot always be kept a secret from them."

"I am afraid not always. However, it is not necessary to say anything on the subject at present."

"I would rather they should hear it from you than any one else," said Ina faintly. "They will know the exact truth,—kindly told."

"Do you mean, dear, that you would rather I should tell them now?"

Ina was silent for a minute, and he could feel how her lately cold hands were burning.

"I think I should," she said in a hurried low tone. "I could not bear to be always with them,—feeling as if it were a secret,—and that they must know it some day. If it alters their feeling for me, I would rather have it at once. Is it wrong to wish it,—for poor papa's sake?" she asked anxiously.

"No, dear, it is very natural. I will tell them to-day. But now I think you have talked enough, for you are not well. Come and lie down on this sofa."

"I am disturbing you so," Ina said, but he smiled at the idea, laid her comfortably on the couch, drew the curtains of the windows, so as to shade her eyes, and taking a chair by her side, began quietly reading aloud.

Anything less nicely-modulated than his voice would have increased the pain in her head, but the effect was so soothing that, though unable to attend to the sense of the words, she gradually grew quiet and composed, and the nervous inclination to sob entirely left her. Still he continued, lowering his voice, and making it every minute more monotonous,

till he saw that she had sunk into a heavy sleep. Then, with a rather anxious glance at the hot flush on her cheek, he rose and noiselessly left the room. One of the servants was in the hall, and he stopped to say,—

"Susan, you need not ring the dinner-bell to-day. Miss Ina is asleep, and must not be disturbed."

Much amazed Susan promised obedience, and he passed on, leaving her in considerable wonderment. Was Miss Mignonette, of all people, going to take to sleeping in the daytime?

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Is she not fair to see,
Lying so quietly?"

C. MACREADY.

"PAPA, have you seen anything of Mignonette?" exclaimed Antonia, as Mr. Vincent entered the drawing-room, where she, Lady Isabelle, and the three boys were all assembled. "I cannot find her, and she is not in her room."

"She has been with me in the study, for some time. I have left here there asleep on the sofa, and I have given orders that the dinner-bell is not to be rung, as it might disturb her."

Exclamations of surprise greeted this information, and Lady Isabelle asked,—"Is she not well?"

"Not very. Overdone, I think,—over-excited, rather."

"I know," cried Guy. "She has found something in the secret drawer."

"Has she really?" asked Aubrey. "Anything of importance, papa?"

"Guy is not far wrong. I want to have a little talk with you all, but I do not know whether there is quite time before dinner."

"Oh, plenty," cried two or three voices, Antonia adding,—"The first bell won't ring,—I mean it won't be time to dress for more than half-an-hour."

"I thought it was almost five."

"Dinner is later than usual to-night," said Lady Isabelle. "What is this, Horace?" and the accent of amazement made them all turn to her.

"A letter to me from Everard Mignon, written the very evening of his death, and placed in the secret drawer of his desk, to be posted on the following day. It has remained there ever since."

Lady Isabelle adjusted her spectacles with trembling hands, and read in silence. She gave it back, with a grave,—

"Thank you, Horace. I am glad to have seen it."

"I was sure you would be, mother."

"I am. A year ago I could not have said so. But now I am heartily glad and thankful."

"A letter from uncle Everard," repeated Antonia, unable any longer to restrain herself.

"Yes, and I have been obliged to show it to Ina, and explain one or two circumstances about her father, which I wished to have kept from her. As you must know all sooner or later, she prefers that you should hear the simple truth from me."

"The reason of uncle Everard's keeping it such a secret about Ina?" asked Aubrey. "Well, I have often felt very curious."

"I have no doubt of it, and you have all pleased me much by your ready acquiescence in my wishes. I am quite ready now, however, to tell you all that I have told Mignonette. You have noticed lately that she has seemed grave and unlike herself."

"Any one with eyes must have seen that," said Guy.

"The reason was that she overheard a lady in conversation remark to some one else, that I had lost my fortune through your uncle Everard Mignon."

"So that was it!" said Lady Isabelle. "Who could have been so imprudent?"

"Was it on the day she went to the Hardwickes'?" exclaimed Antonia.

"Lost your fortune through uncle Everard?" repeated Aubrey.

"Papa, was it true?" cried Guy impatiently.

"I must answer you all in turn. The words

were not intended for her ears, mother, and she evidently considers no one was to blame. I do not know who spoke, though I believe I can guess. It was on the day that she went to the Hardwickes', Annie, and I have no doubt Mr. Percival found her soon afterwards. The remark was not untrue, Guy."

"How strange that we should never have known it," said Cyril.

"I did not care to tell you when you were all very young. I loved the memory of your poor uncle too much, to wish my children to have any hard thoughts about him. And Ina's coming decided me to delay it indefinitely."

"How did it happen?" inquired Aubrey abruptly.

"Through my having invested a large amount of property in the bank of which he was a director. At that time, though I did not know it, the bank was on the verge of failing. My money, I have no doubt, helped to stave off ruin for a time—unconsciously as I rendered assistance. But it came at last, when Cyril was a baby."

"Then had uncle Everard anything to do with your placing the money in that bank?" asked Aubrey.

"He persuaded me to do so," said Mr. Vincent quietly.

"Not, surely, knowing that the bank was failing!"

"Knowing that it must fail at once, without the help of my capital,—and that it probably would before long, in any case. I believe they were too deeply involved ever to hope for final extrication. I have no doubt, however, that he tried to persuade himself I should not lose by it, and that ruin might be indefinitely postponed. And I was young, and careless, and easily persuaded."

"More than that, Horace, we trusted him implicitly," said Lady Isabelle gravely. "Even I was completely won over by his specious fair-seeming arguments."

"Then it was cool premeditated deceit on his part!" Aubrey said in a low suppressed tone.

"I think he was as much self-deceived as deceiving, Aubrey," replied Mr. Vincent.

"Papa, do you mean that *all* your money was in that bank?" Aubrey asked, with some impatience.

"Not all, but a large proportion. When my father died, his affairs were left in a state of some embarrassment, though it was nothing that would in the end have seriously affected the property. However, I was ignorant of everything like business, easily satisfied by Everard's protestations and arguments; and very glad of the increased income, which for a time was mine."

"Was he sorry afterwards, papa?" asked Antonia.

"I have never felt any doubt of it though he did not actually say that he was. I know that he was very unhappy."

"But, papa, surely the failure of the bank and his name in connection with it were well known," said Cyril. "I wonder we have never heard about it before now."

"He was at the time of course involved in the public disgrace of all the managers of the bank, and that was the reason of his going abroad. But these things die out in the course of time, and all the names and circumstances connected with the failure of a particular bank are not likely to be widely known, after the lapse of fifteen years,—or even eight or ten years. It was always possible that you might hear of it, and in such a case I should have explained more to you. But the fact of his having induced me to put my money into the bank was known to very few indeed."

"It was disgraceful," muttered Aubrey. "You did not think then of doing it at first, papa,—before he asked you?"

"No,—I believe I was rather averse to the plan at first," replied Mr. Vincent quietly. "But I was easily convinced of its desirableness,—so easily that I

am ashamed of myself now. I should like you to read this letter, Aubrey."

"Let them all see it, Horace," observed Lady Isabelle. "There is nothing in it that you can mind their reading, unless it is his praise of yourself."

Mr. Vincent did not object. Aubrey received and perused the letter, with a burning cheek and frowning brow. Even when he had passed it on to Antonia he uttered not a word, but sat with his elbow on the table, and his hand half-concealing his eyes. Mr. Vincent could guess something of the struggle that went on within. Lady Isabelle was the first to speak.

"If only we had received this two years ago! It was always a sad trial to poor dear Anna, that she knew no more about her sister's death."

But there was a smile of calm assurance—sorrowful yet sweet—upon Mr. Vincent's face, as he answered,—"Mother, she has known it long ago, though we have all been in ignorance. I shall love now to think of the three together,—safe in their Saviour's presence—all wrongs forgiven, and all misunderstandings swept away."

Aubrey lifted his head, with a look almost of wonder at his father.

"Papa, were you not angry at the time?"

"No," said Lady Isabelle, before Mr. Vincent could speak. "I can tell you, Aubrey, that I used to think both him and your mother almost weakly ready to forgive. But I see now how beautiful their conduct was. Hush, Horace,—let me answer the boy in my own way. You will do well, Aubrey, to imitate your father's conduct. I believe that his feeling was almost entirely of grief and disappointment, at having been so mistaken in your uncle, and deceived by him."

"Wilfully and deliberately deceived," murmured Aubrey.

"Yes,—wilfully and deliberately at the time," said Mr. Vincent slowly. "But deeply repented afterwards. Aubrey, I should be grieved beyond measure, if I thought that a son of mine could harbour any feeling of resentment after all these long years."

Aubrey did not answer, but his brow contracted uneasily, and Antonia ventured to say,—

"Poor Mignonette! I don't wonder she was so distressed, papa."

"Nor do I, dear. Our efforts must now be directed towards assuring her how little we feel or think of her father's past conduct. It would be sad indeed if any shadow were cast by it over her happiness."

"She had nothing to do with it. *She* cannot be blamed," said Aubrey shortly.

"But to hear or to feel that her father was blamed, would pain her almost more than to be blamed herself, Aubrey."

"I would do anything in the world to make her feel that she is just the same, and a great deal more to us than ever!" said Cyril, breaking his long silence with sudden fervency.

"And so would I! And so would I!" exclaimed Antonia and Guy together.

"You will find no difficulty in showing her that. I agree with Cyril in thinking that she will be more to us now than ever,—now that we know her father so wished her to belong to us. Aubrey, what do you say?"

No answer, but Mr. Vincent fancied he could detect a softened look upon the set features.

"I know I may depend upon you all never to mention a word of what I have told you," he said, looking round, and receiving eager promises of secrecy. "If inquiries are made by those who have heard something of the tale, and desire further enlightenment, do not encourage them. And be careful how you talk to Ina. I have gone somewhat more into particulars, and spoken more openly with you,

than I could do with her. Aubrey, I want you to come with me for a minute."

"Don't forget that it is dinner-time," said Lady Isabelle, who had not been oblivious of the hour, even in the excitement of the past engrossing conversation.

Mr. Vincent promised, and led the way to the study, followed by Aubrey. They entered together,—as softly as possible. Ina was still asleep on the sofa. Her hands were clasped loosely together, and her fair face lay in a framework of tangled curls. The sweet childlike expression of lip and brow was unaltered, but there was a troubled look on the latter, a sorrowful curve in the former, and a hot red spot on either cheek. She moved slightly,—a quiver passed over her features,—and, "Oh, poor papa!" broke from her, in a voice of touching sadness and compassion.

Mr. Vincent glanced at his son, and saw him hastily brush his hand across his eyes. They went out, without speaking, for fear of disturbing her, but the door was no sooner shut behind them than Aubrey said huskily,—

"You needn't be afraid, papa. No one could willingly do or say anything to grieve a sweet creature like that. I'll forgive uncle Everard from my heart, for her sake."

One moment Mr. Vincent's penetrating eyes looked into his son's. "I would rather hear you say, for a higher reason, Aubrey,—even for the sake of One who forgives us our trespasses."

"Yes, I know you are right, papa," was the still husky response, and no more was said, but Aubrey did not forget this little scene.

It was another hour before Ina opened her eyes. When she did, it was with a start, a bewildered wonder where she could be, and a consciousness that she was not alone. The first face she saw was Antonia's, bending over her.

"Mignonette, darling, I know all," she whispered, and for a moment her cool cheek was pressed against Ina's burning one, but the next instant Lady Isabelle's hand drew her quickly away.

"Annie, you are quite startling her. The poor child is hardly awake yet. How do you feel now, my dear?"

So exceedingly kind was the tone that Ina looked up in doubt, hardly able to believe that the words were meant for herself, till she saw the direction of Lady Isabelle's eyes.

"Thank you,—I think—I don't know where I am," she said confusedly. Then as recollection returned she tried to sit up, but was obliged to lie back,

with a strange giddy oppressed sensation that sent the colour from her cheeks. "I think my head aches still," she added rather faintly.

Lady Isabelle's soft hand was laid gently upon it.

"Lie still, my dear,—don't try to move," she said kindly but decidedly. "You have had a great deal to try you lately, and I don't wonder you are overdone."

Ina's look was full of gratitude, and she pressed Lady Isabelle's hand to her lips, murmuring,—"It is so kind! dear grandmamma!"

For a minute or two she shut her eyes, while Lady Isabelle sat and rather anxiously watched her face. Presently she gave another startled look round, asking,—

"Is Annie here? I heard her say something."

"Never mind now, Mignonette," said Antonia affectionately.

"But I would rather. Did you say uncle had told you—all that I know?"

"Yes, and you must not think about it any more," said Antonia cheerfully.

"But,—what did Aubrey say?"

"Aubrey is here to answer for himself," said Lady Isabelle, and he came forward. "What do you say, Aubrey?"

"That I would rather have Mignonette than all

the estates in England," said Aubrey, looking down upon her, with a face which bore no trace of the displeasure with which he had heard the tale. "I am sure she is much more necessary to our happiness."

"You will quite forgive him?" Ina whispered. "Quite, Aubrey?"

"Entirely," said Aubrey gravely. "As entirely as papa has done, and I can hardly say more. I will never willingly yield to an unkind thought of him in my heart." Leaning down a little, he added only for her ear,—"I do not promise this of *myself*, Ina."

She understood him, and looked satisfied,—especially when Antonia observed,—"Cyril and Guy wanted to tell you, Mignonette, that they only felt sorry for you, and glad for themselves to think that you so thoroughly belong to us now. But grandmamma said she could not have you overwhelmed the moment you were awake."

"Now, Aubrey, I think you may as well go for your walk, and leave Annie and me to take care of Mignonette," said Lady Isabelle,—using the pet name, which was rarely heard from her. Ina felt proportionately grateful for the kindness which suggested it. "She must have something to eat, and then I think I shall send her to bed."

Aubrey nodded to Ina, with a smile, and walked off. He found himself condemned to a solitary ramble, for both Mr. Vincent and the younger boys had disappeared. Not, however, in the same direction. Cyril and Guy had gone up the hill, and Mr. Vincent had made his way to the Rectory. He found Alison alone, and after talking to her for a short time on general subjects, he introduced that of Ina's recent depression, inquiring whether she had noticed it.

"Indeed I have," Alison said at once. "She certainly has not been in good spirits."

"And you have no idea of the reason?"

"None. I imagined it to be her meeting with Mr. Percival that had in some way caused it, until the girls came home from their visit. Annie told me, and says she told you, that Mr. Percival found her crying and evidently unhappy, so it could not be caused by seeing him."

"You did not know of anything that happened on that day,—of anything said in her hearing that could have distressed her?"

"No," said Alison unsuspiciously. "Except indeed, that Annie says she confessed to Mr. Percival having overheard something. But what it was I have no idea. Unless—but no—it is impossible!"

"Unless what? Can you remember anything?"

"No, it seems absurd. I did not even think of it till this moment. She could not have been near. Mrs. Williams and I were walking among the trees, and Mrs. Williams made one or two inquiries about Ina's father. But I answered her as shortly as I could."

"I thought so," said Mr. Vincent gravely. "I felt sure no one else could have known anything of the affair. Ina did hear you, Alison, and was so shocked and overcome that at the moment she really had no power to make known her presence to you."

"I am very sorry," exclaimed Alison,—"very sorry indeed. I know you were so anxious that she should be kept in ignorance."

"It cannot be helped, and I do not think that I could have avoided telling her under any circumstances," said Mr. Vincent kindly. "A letter has been discovered in her desk, concealed in a secret drawer, where it has been ever since it was written to me by her father, a few hours before his death. This necessitated some explanation."

Alison's surprise was extreme. "A letter to you! And after all these years. I can hardly believe it," she said.

"Yes,—telling me about Ina and other things.

We are all glad, and it is very pleasant for her, poor child, to know that he wished her to live with us."

"Did he? Oh, I am very glad," said Alison warmly. "It has seemed so singular that he should have left her in such a state of uncertainty."

"I could not understand his doing so,—but this explains all. It is a singular thought, that had he lived one day longer, she would probably have been here for the last eight years."

"Very," said Alison seriously.

"You will not talk about this," said Mr. Vincent. "I know I may trust you not to repeat anything. We may mention it to one or two of our friends, but I should not like the subject to be under general discussion."

He related a few more particulars concerning the letter, and the manner in which Ina had heard the story of her father's conduct. Alison sat lost in thought after his departure, until the return of Marcus from his parish work. She then poured out eagerly all she had heard, adding,—

"It seems strange, as uncle says, that if his death had taken place only a few hours later, it would have made everything so different for Ina."

"There must have been some good reason,

Alison, though it appears strange to us. Perhaps we may some day see what it was."

"I almost think I can see it now," said Alison. "I never shall forget what her coming was into that melancholy house. And if she had lived here from childhood, it could not possibly have been the same. She would have felt dear aunt Anna's death almost as much as any one. It was the newness and freshness of her bright face and happy ways that had such an effect upon them all. I believe she really saved Annie's life. The poor child seemed at that time just as if she were going off into a decline. Does it not appear as if the long silence about uncle Everard,—which was a great trial at the time to aunt Anna and uncle Horace,—was only 'a blessing in disguise,' Marcus?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"Dreaming strange and longing fancies."

A. PROCTER.

ALL through the following night Ina tossed restlessly from side to side, or lay in a dreamy trance of feverish oppression. And hour after hour, as she strove in vain to sleep, and to drive away the constant succession of wakeful thoughts which ran riot through her brain, she felt that she was not alone in the room. Again and again the handsome well-known face of Lady Isabelle bent over her pillow, wearing a look of kind grave concern, while something cool was laid upon her burning forehead or held to her parched lips. Once for a little while Benson's face appeared instead, but Lady Isabelle soon came back. Then a faint wonder stole into Ina's mind, whether "grandmamma would not be tired?" and she tried to ask the question.

But either the right words failed to come at her bidding, or her voice was not distinct, for Lady Isabelle did not appear to understand the inquiry. She said something soothing in return, but Ina seemed to have no power to attend. Gradually the long night passed away, and morning came, but she did not even think of getting up. Once she tried to raise her head, but the pain obliged her to lay it down again, with a low sharp cry, which she had no power to suppress, and Lady Isabelle's hands were both laid on her forehead, with words that seemed to come from a long way off,—"Poor child! lie still, darling, and don't try to move."

Even the endearing word, so rarely heard from Lady Isabelle, failed to surprise her. Presently Mr. Halifax came in, and stood by her side, and asked questions in his slow quiet way; and then Antonia entered the room, with tears in her eyes; and after her Josephine, with her kind face full of anxiety. But Ina took all the coming and going very quietly. She did not feel as if she had anything to do with it. Not even when they spoke and she answered, did she lose that strange solitary far-away feeling, as if they were all at a great distance, and she lying alone—quite alone.

No, not quite alone! Ina never failed to feel that

One was near her,—One holding her up, standing by her side, smiling upon her. Once or twice the lonely nervous sinking sensation was so great, that she held out her hands in terror, crying,—

"Oh, papa!—uncle!—don't let me fall. Oh, why is no one near to help me?" But the next instant she remembered that One was indeed near, and sweetly added,—"Never mind! Jesus is here, and He won't let me fall."

"You will not fall here, my darling," said Lady Isabelle reassuringly. "You are safe in your own room." But Ina shook her head sadly.

"Not where you are, grandmamma. I should not fall there. I can see the cliff close to me here. But I am not afraid now."

Yet through all this she rarely if ever lost all consciousness. She knew she was in her own bed, with kind friends around her. At times her head was less confused, and then for a minute or two she could talk and ask questions, but their voices always sounded dreamy and distant, and it required a painful effort to understand what was said to her.

One day, when she had been suffering more than usual, she became conscious that Mr. Halifax was standing by her side, while Antonia, with tears running down her cheeks, was saying,—

"Oh, Mr. Halifax! *must* you? Her pretty pretty hair! Please please don't cut it all off."

"Annie, this is foolish," Lady Isabelle said. "What do looks matter in comparison with health?"

"Are you going to cut off my hair?" asked Ina gently. "Please do. It makes my head so hot. Never mind, Annie dear. If I get well, it will soon grow again."

But Antonia went away, sobbing uncontrollably. Lady Isabelle herself fetched a pair of scissors, and snipped away at the beautiful silken hair. Ina looked up, smiling, in her face, which was strangely agitated, and raised one of the long tresses which were laid on the bed.

"May Madame have this, granny dear? I think she would be pleased."

"Not too close, Lady Isabelle,—it is unnecessary," Mr. Halifax said hastily. "Take away more underneath, and shorten it all. So,—just to make her head cooler and less oppressed."

Ina dreamily felt that it was a relief, and then thought no more about the matter. At intervals Mr. Vincent's face appeared by her bedside,—sometimes only to say a few kind words, at other times, when she could bear it, to repeat a verse or two of the Bible, or to kneel by her side and utter a brief simple

prayer. Usually she enjoyed and felt better for it, though occasionally the effort to attend was more than she could bear.

It was singular that she was not more troubled with the thought of all that had taken place the last few weeks,—of all indeed that had caused her illness. But though at times the remembrance of her day with the Hardwickes, of the secret drawer in her desk, and of the letter to Mr. Vincent, floated dimly through her mind, nothing remained there long. Less and less, as days passed on, until all active wanderings were exchanged for entire unconsciousness,—whether long or short she could not have told. And then she woke to find Josephine by her side, and the solitary feeling that had so tried her entirely gone.

"Don't try to talk, dear," said Josephine quietly. "Only tell me if you feel better."

"Have I been ill or only asleep?" asked Ina, surprised at the weakness of her own voice. "Am I to drink this? Thank you," she whispered, as Josephine took away the empty glass.

"You are better now, dear. You have been ill, but I hope you will soon feel strong again."

"It seems just as if I had been for a journey all alone," murmured Ina. "And I am tired with it.

But the pain and the uncomfortableness have all left me. Have I been in bed long?"

"A little more than a fortnight."

"So long. I should not have thought it. Then Good Friday and Easter Sunday are past, Josephine? And I did not know it."

Josephine's answer was indistinct, and Ina looked up at her with a gentle smile.

"Are you crying, Josephine? Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing, dear. I am only very glad and thankful to see you better," said Josephine, trying to speak cheerfully.

"Was I in danger then? I did not know that. But I should not have been afraid," she added softly.

"You must not talk any more now, Mignonette," said Josephine, steadying her voice with some difficulty. "I hope you will soon be quite well, and meantime you must keep quiet and rest yourself."

Ina was too weak to continue the conversation. The next few hours were passed in dreamy half-wakeful repose. At intervals she was fully conscious of faces round the bed, and low-voiced remarks, close at hand once more. Once there was a sobbing question from Antonia,—"Oh, when will she look like herself again?"

"I feel like myself now," said Ina, opening her eyes. "Only tired and sleepy."

"Go to sleep then, my dear, and don't talk," was Lady Isabelle's answer, and Ina only whispered,—

"It is so nice to have you all again. You seemed such a long way off. I hope it won't come back."

"No, dear, you are better," said Lady Isabelle, hazarding the answer without understanding what she had meant, but with a satisfied smile Ina sank into a deep sleep, from which she woke greatly refreshed.

"She will do now," Mr. Halifax said when he saw her next. "She will need care, but I do not consider that there is any further cause for anxiety." And Antonia was not the only one that shed tears of joy on hearing his words. Ina was lying the next day in a quiet half-dozing state, when she felt a drop splash suddenly upon her forehead, and looked up in time to see Lady Isabelle's handkerchief passed hastily over her eyes, as if she were ashamed of such unwonted weakness.

"Dear dear grandmamma, is anything the matter?" she asked.

"No, my dear,"—and Lady Isabelle, who was fanning her, paused a moment to sit down on the bed. "It is nothing. I was only a little grieved to see you

look so altered,—and thankful that our Mignonette is spared to us."

"Darling grandmamma!" and the wasted arm was thrown round her. "Are you really glad? I have been thinking once or twice that I should have been out of everybody's way if I had died. I don't mean that I *really* thought it," she added, alarmed at a sudden sob from Lady Isabelle. "Only it came into my head."

"You must not fancy such a thing again, darling," said Lady Isabelle, in a tone of rare tenderness. "My own grandchildren are scarcely dearer to me than you are. I never knew,—I don't think indeed that any of us knew,—until the last three weeks, how completely you have won all our affections. If you speak again as you did just now, I shall think you are remembering my coldness when first you came."

"Oh, grandmamma!—please don't say that. I know there was reason."

"There was no reason at all. I thought myself a Christian, Ina, and you have taught me that I was an unforgiving resentful old woman."

"Oh, please,—indeed I didn't mean it," said Ina in great distress. "I never thought of such a thing. You have always been so very very kind."

"My dear, I am quite aware that you never

thought of such a thing. You only twined yourself round my heart in your loving way, and showed me what you were yourself, and then I saw myself in contrast. But there,—don't cry, Mignonette,"—for Ina was quite sobbing at Lady Isabelle's self-accusations and painful praise. "Don't you like to know what a dear grandchild you are to me?"

"Anything,—I mean, very much,—only don't speak of yourself, grandmamma," pleaded poor Ina. "It makes me so unhappy."

"Then I will not do it again," said Lady Isabelle, satisfied no doubt with having "done it" once most thoroughly. She saw that Ina was hardly in a state to bear such agitating conversation, and she began again quietly to fan her, and to tell a long story of her own early school-days, till the invalid's composure was fully restored.

All through the long days of Ina's restoration to health, not an allusion was made by those around her to the painful cause of her illness. The only way in which they reminded her of it was by their exceeding kindness and their affectionate attentions. Ina greatly felt this delicate care for her feelings, and in her gratitude for the loving care showered upon her, she could scarcely look upon the past with grief. Indeed, it was with a feeling of positive relief that

she remembered her old doubting bewildered feelings, whenever she had thought of her father, and the fear which had so often troubled her that she might be living in a home where he had wished her not to be.

These were now completely removed. She could never think of her father's conduct without sadness, —but it was a sadness mitigated in many ways. Not only by the repentant letter written so soon before his death, but by Mr. Vincent's affection for his memory, by her entire adoption into her uncle's family, and above all by the assurances of both Mr. Vincent and his mother that she had already done so much to repay all that they had lost. She might at the time that they spoke be distressed, incredulous, almost pained, but afterwards the words recurred with soothing power to her mind. She did not believe all that they said,—she did not believe any of the personal praise,—but she could not be ignorant that she had been the means of arousing Antonia, from a state of almost dangerous depression of mind and body, and that her influence had not been entirely fruitless among the boys.

Meanwhile the time had almost arrived for the departure of Aubrey to Cambridge. It was doubtful at first whether he would be able to see Ina before going, but when the day came she was well enough to

be lifted out of bed for the first time, and laid on the sofa. There she received him, wrapped up in light shawls, her thin face surrounded by a small white cap, from beneath which peeped the fair hair, short as a boy's. Aubrey was very much shocked at the change in her appearance, and asked her "if she always looked as white as that?"

"Oh, I shall soon get my colour back," said Ina, smiling. "It is my cropped hair which makes such an object of me."

"It alters you, certainly," said Aubrey, with an air of consideration. "But I see now that your face is the same."

"I feel quite like myself, only weak. But that is nothing."

"I don't know. It seemed a good deal to me last Christmas, Mignonette. Do you remember my asking you if you possessed fortitude?"

"I think I remember your dodging me rather persistently with questions, when I wanted you to dictate Greek."

"Well, my question is answered now. The whole house has been ringing with praises of your patience, and your——"

"Oh, Aubrey, what nonsense you talk!"

"But it is the truth," said Aubrey, with an ap-

pealing glance at Antonia who laughed and nodded. "Even if I had wished to believe the contrary, I could not have done so in the face of all I heard."

"I had nothing to make me cross."

"Except illness,—which is generally supposed to be quite enough," said Aubrey.

"But I couldn't," persisted Ina, almost annoyed at such determined commendation. "How could I be cross, when dear grandmamma and Annie and Josephine and Alison were always about me, taking care of me, and doing everything they could to make me comfortable?"

"How could I be cross in pretty similar circumstances, Mignonette?"

"I don't mean to answer your questions at all, if you turn everything against yourself," returned Ina decidedly. "How is your hand now, Aubrey?"

"Oh, as well as it is likely to be. I could not lift that chair with it, but I can write now with some character, instead of producing those miserable little feeble scrawls that were the result of my first attempts. I'm getting used to the unmanageable propensities of two of my fingers. I can't expect now to shine in cricket and boating, but it won't affect my studies, and that is the important point."

"That is what I call being brave," said Ina

smiling, as Lady Isabelle came in, to say that his father was waiting for him, and that Ina had talked enough. He squeezed her hand, told her to grow rosy and stout before he saw her again, and hurried out of the room, but his father's first words were lost upon him, and an hour later as he drove away, his last glance was directed to the window of Ina's room.

But for the constant attention which she still required, he would have been even more missed than he was. The first two or three days after his departure Cyril and Guy looked quite out of their element, and seemed unable to decide where to go or what to do, without their accustomed leader. Indeed, to every one in the family the loss of Aubrey was a real trial, but it was borne cheerfully, and they talked far more of seeing him again at the conclusion of the term, than of having lost him at the commencement.

"Uncle Horace," Ina said timidly one day, "I have something in my pocket-book that I have been wanting to give you for some time."

"What is it, dear?"

"This," and Ina drew out a bank-note, which she laid in his hand.

"Twenty pounds! You wealthy young lady! I did not know you were so rich."

"It is not mine," said Ina. "I found it in the drawer,—with the letter."

"If it is not yours, I do not know whose it is," said Mr. Vincent smiling. "Do you want me to change it for you?"

"No, it is yours please, uncle," said Ina.

"My dear child, it belonged to your father, and everything that was his belongs rightfully to you."

"No, I would rather not," whispered Ina. "I don't feel as if I had any right——"

He knew what she was thinking of, and patted her cheek laughingly.

"Come, come, you must not be *too* sensitive, Mignonette,—especially with your old uncle. Put it back in your pocket-book, and keep it till you like to spend it."

"I would rather not," Ina repeated. "I shall only feel unhappy when I see it."

"And you would rather I should spend it for you than have it yourself to spend upon others? That is your usual use for money, is it not?"

"I don't want either," said Ina, with beseeching eyes, but he placed the note in his purse, with a look that did not promise any very close compliance with her wishes.

"Is there anything else, Mignonette, that you

wish? I think I see a questioning expression in your face.

"I did want to know one thing," said Ina, looking down. "Uncle Horace, would you mind—would there be any harm,—if I told Josephine just a little about the letter? I think she would like to know that papa wished me to live here."

"Tell any one you like, dear," he said, aware that she would not wish to speak on such a subject to many. "Was Josephine inclined to think he would *not* have liked it?"

"I told her once that I was rather—rather—that it troubled me a little sometimes," said Ina gently. "Was I wrong?"

"No, dear. Perhaps if you had told me instead of her, I could have set your heart more at rest."

"I asked you at Brussels, uncle, if you knew the reason that papa had kept me from you, and I was afraid to try again."

"After all, dear, it is as well that you did not. I do not think I should have told you enough to satisfy you. And until we had the letter I could only conjecture his probable wishes."

"Then I may tell Josephine," said Ina, looking pleased, and the next day, when alone with her for half-an-hour, she did not allow the opportunity to

pass. Josephine was greatly astonished, and at the first moment almost thought that Ina had a slight return of her wanderings. However, the next instant she was re-assured to see how quiet and composed she was, and only asked for further particulars. Ina gave them, so far as concerned her father's wishes about herself, and the manner in which the letter had been discovered.

"I'll show you the drawer if you like," she said in conclusion. "Would you mind giving me the desk off the table, Josephine? Thank you. Look, —if I pull this little slip, that piece of wood will spring out. There! No one would dream of finding a drawer behind that, unless they had seen one before, as Guy had. *I* don't remember ever hearing of such a thing."

"No, I hardly wonder at your ignorance of it, Ina. There is not the very smallest appearance of anything behind the wood, when it is in its place. How did Guy find it out?"

"He was struck with there being so much waste space. Guy is very quick, you know, at anything of that kind. But I wonder that even he should have thought of it."

"May I come in?" asked Mr. Vincent's voice at the door, and he entered, bearing a portentous brown

paper parcel. Ina looked with wondering eyes, but he laid it aside, until Josephine had gone, which was a few minutes later.

"Now, Mignonette, will you open it yourself, or shall I cut the string for you?"

"But I don't know what it is, uncle."

"Only the first instalment of purchases to be effected by a certain twenty pounds, given yesterday into my charge."

Ina's "Oh!" was rather distressed, but he looked so comical that she could not resist smiling, and he brought the parcel to her side.

"Now, Miss Mignonette, let us see if the purchases are to your mind."

Antonia ran into the room at this moment, exclaiming,—"Oh, I am so glad you have not begun to examine yet. Papa and I chose the things together, Mignonette. I hope you will like them."

Ina said nothing, but looked doubtful whether to cry or laugh.

A packet of books was handed to her first,—most of which she had at some time expressed a desire to see. How Antonia had contrived to remember all the names was a mystery, but there they lay in their blue, red, and brown bindings, a very tempting collection. Then came a handsome photographic

album. Thirdly a compact and neat little writing-case. Fourthly a small silk-lined work-basket, nicely fitted up. And fifthly a bundle of fancy-work, mats to be braided, and slippers to be worked, which Ina would find a great assistance in passing the time, during her confinement to the sofa.

"Oh, it is too bad," she said, as each new purchase was placed in her hands. They had not all come from the same shop, but the different parcels had been rolled up by Mr. Vincent into one large one, before being brought into the bedroom. Lastly he handed her a pretty little red purse, desired her to open it, and begged to know whether he or she should keep it. Ina obeyed the injunction, and found inside a ten-pound bank-note, and six pounds in gold.

"Well?" he smilingly said.

"It is of no use, uncle, if you are going to spend it all in this way," said Ina despairingly. "And I don't believe you could possibly have bought all those things for four pounds."

"What? you think I have not spent enough! Let me have the purse back, and you shall see what I will do to-morrow."

"No,—I am afraid," said Ina, shaking her head, and privately thinking that she had better spend the money on others, than allow it to be spent on herself.

"Then it is settled," said Mr. Vincent quietly. "We have something else to speak about now. Do you know that Mr. Halifax prescribes change of air for you, as soon as you are strong enough to travel, Ina?"

"I shall not need it, uncle. I am growing strong very fast."

"You look particularly stout, certainly! Madame Boucher will hardly recognize such a robust Mignonette, I should think."

Ina looked bewildered, and Antonia exclaimed,—

"Papa means it, Ina. We are all going,—at least papa, and grandmamma, and you, and I,—to Brussels. Cyril and Guy are to sleep at the Rectory while we are away."

"Going to Brussels!" repeated Ina. "Oh, Annie! Oh, uncle!"

"I'm afraid it is settled, Mignonette," said Mr. Vincent. "Unless you feel an unconquerable aversion to the place, we think of spending three weeks or a month there before long. Perhaps though you would prefer Berlin, or Rome, or Vienna, or Moscow?"

"Uncle Horace, you know I should like *nothing* so well as to see dear old Brussels again. And Madame Boucher!—Oh, do you really mean it?"

"Write and ask Aubrey. It was his idea before

he went, though we have not really decided upon the plan until the last day or two."

"I think I shall grow well with only thinking about it," said Ina, smiling.

"Then perhaps we shall not need to go at all."

"Never mind what papa says, Mignonette," interposed Antonia. "He wants it as much as any one does. And I have always longed to go abroad."

"I only make one stipulation," said Mr. Vincent, "and that is that when we leave Brussels you do not leave your heart behind you, Ina, with Madame Boucher. But I hope there is no danger. Do you think there is?"

CHAPTER XX.

" The sea! the sea! the open sea!
The blue, the fresh, the ever free!"

BARRY CORNWALL.

IT was a pleasant day for a trip over the water. The breeze was strong and somewhat gusty, and the steamer plunged a good deal in the short broken waves of the Channel, between Dover and Calais, but the blue sky was cloudless, and the sea sparkled and flashed brilliantly in the clear sunshine. Several passengers disappeared below, to conceal their miseries from heartless observers, while others endeavoured to brave out their indisposition upon deck.

A rather small proportion of those on board proved themselves happily superior to the common weakness of landsmen on the water. Amongst those belonging to this class was a small group seated together, somewhat apart from their fellow-passengers. A handsome erect old lady, with smooth grey hair and clear brown

eyes; a gentleman, unmistakably her son, as good-looking, but with hair that scarcely yet showed signs of changing its colour; and two young girls. One was thin and sallow-complexioned, but far from unhealthy in her appearance, and bearing a strong resemblance both to the gentleman and the old lady. Her companion was nearly as tall as herself, gracefully formed, with a very sweet face, bearing traces of recent illness, and short fair silken hair, curling closely round her head. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes dancing with enjoyment.

"Is it not delightful, Annie? I always think one of the pleasantest things in the world is rapid movement,—whether in a steamer, or an express train, or even in a carriage with two horses."

"Rather different measures of speed, Mignonette," observed her uncle.

"And the pleasure is of a different kind and degree, uncle. But I enjoy each in its own way from the same reason. I like to feel I am going on—on—as fast as possible. I think it is a kind of vent—a kind of *expenditure*, I mean, of my excitement."

"You like it when you are excited then," said Antonia.

"Yes,—and always, unless I am ill or unhappy. Even then it might do me good."

"I think I should rather prefer solitude and quiet in such a case," said Mr. Vincent smiling.

"I should too,—sometimes," said Ina gravely. "But not always. Isn't the breeze delicious? It quite tastes of salt."

Mr. Vincent directed her attention by a glance to a "cadaverous-faced young gentleman," and "pallid young lady," at a short distance, remarking in a low voice,—

"Don't you think it is rather hard-hearted to expatiate so warmly on your enjoyment, with those poor unhappy people, almost within hearing?"

"Not *quite* within hearing, uncle, so we may say what we like. Perhaps it would be kinder if we were to look more sympathizing. Oh!—there's Mr. Percival!"

And at this moment the gentleman appeared in front of them, gazing doubtfully at Ina, till she started forward and shook hands with him.

"What!—la Mignonne! How you have grown and altered. I did not know you again. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"I have been ill," said Ina. "I wrote the other day, and told Miss Percival about it."

"Did you? Poor child! But I have been rambling about in all directions, and letters are waiting

for me in two or three different places, so that is the reason I have not heard."

He was shaking hands with Antonia and her father, whom he had already met,—Mr. Vincent having gone to the farm at Tanglepool, to take home the girls after their visit. He had not yet seen Lady Isabelle, but the ceremony of introduction was soon performed, after which he turned again to Ina.

"You really look as if you had been seriously ill," he said. "Was it long after you left Tanglepool?"

"She was taken ill within a week," said Lady Isabelle. "It was a severe attack. But she is getting on nicely now, and I think it is the loss of her hair which alters her more than anything else."

"I see! I could not make out what was wrong. And really she is in expression more like the Mignonette of old days, than she was when last I saw her. I suppose the attack was coming on then, and made her feel poorly and depressed."

He looked rather curious, but no one was inclined to enlighten him, Ina only remarking,—

"And I have grown very fast since then, Mr. Percival. Grandmamma says I am quite overtaking Annie."

"There is a decided diminution in the space between your respective heights," said Mr. Percival

gravely. "What happy people you are to be able to sit on deck."

"It is Annie's first attempt at anything like a voyage," said Ina. "But she seems to be as good a sailor as grandmamma, or uncle, or I."

"I wonder at myself for feeling so well on a steamer," said Lady Isabelle. "Sailing I have never minded, but this plunging and shaking is a very different thing."

"Ay, speed is the only advantage of a steamer over a sailing-vessel," said Mr. Percival. "We have at least no fear of being becalmed. Otherwise I cannot say I prefer it."

"I should like to try sailing," said Ina. "But I don't think I could enjoy it much more than this. Oh, I wanted to ask if Miss Percival was abroad or in England?"

"In England. Whereabouts it is difficult to say, without consideration. I left her in London, and then I went to Manchester, then to Brighton, then to Dover, and then on board a certain steamer going to France. She meanwhile was to travel to Eastbourne, then to Brighton, and then to Dover, where she will await my return next week. She must be at Brighton now."

"Do you not get rather tired of such an unsettled

life,—if that is your usual plan of proceeding?" asked Mr. Vincent.

"Why, no,—we are used to it now. Not that we always go on at that rate. Sometimes we spend six or eight months in one place. But it is years since we have had a regular home, or a fixed residence of any kind."

"I hope one of your next journeys will be to Rockstone," said Lady Isabelle. "I need not say how much pleasure it will give us, if we can induce you and your sister to pay us a visit."

"Could you not manage it?" added Mr. Vincent, seeing Ina's pleased look. "As soon after our return home as you find it possible. We will write then and ask you to fix upon a time."

With many thanks the invitation was accepted, much to Ina's delight. But they were now drawing near to Calais, and soon, with hurried good-byes, the friends separated. One night was spent at Lille, which our travellers reached that evening, and on the following day they continued their journey to Brussels. Rooms were secured in a hotel for a day or two, until apartments of a more reasonable description could be procured for the remainder of their stay. Ina was greatly excited, and very anxious to go at once to Madame Boucher, but on Mr. Vincent's re-

marking that they were all tired, and would be glad of a little rest and refreshment, she submitted to the delay with her usual cheerfulness.

"After all, it is not as if Madame Boucher were looking out for us," she remarked. "I am glad we did not let her know we were coming. It will be such a nice surprise for her."

"Don't you think she will have forgotten you by this time, Mignonette?"

"Not very likely, uncle. Especially as I had a letter only last week, telling me how much she wished she could see me again."

"Well, I acknowledge that it was rather an unlikely supposition of mine. Do you think her house is within a walk for you this evening?"

"Oh, quite," said Ina quickly. "Unless grandmamma is tired."

"I shall not go this evening, dear. Another day I hope to make Madame Boucher's acquaintance."

"And, Ina, would you rather I should go or stay at home with grandmamma?" asked Antonia. "Would you not like to have Madame to yourself the first evening?"

"I shall enjoy twice as much seeing her if you are with me, Annie. No, I don't want her alone. I have nothing to tell her in private, except about all

your kindness to me. I can't say everything that I want before you, because I know you would interrupt me."

"Oh, if that is all I shall certainly go," said Antonia, laughing. "And I really should be sorry to miss the sight of your first meeting."

Half-an-hour later they were dressed and leaving the hotel,—Mr. Vincent remarking as they went out,—

"This is all very familiar to you, Mignonette."

"Oh, yes, I remember it very well indeed. I'm going to take you round by the Boulevards, Annie. It is scarcely longer, and much prettier. If uncle does not mind, I mean."

Mr. Vincent told her laughingly to lead where she liked, and they would follow. "I am not afraid of your taking us far out of the way, until you have seen Madame," he said. "I suppose you are not very anxious to defer the interview."

"Not very, uncle! Oh, look, Annie, that is one of the *Barricades*. If you passed through that gate, the *gardes* would examine any bag or basket that you happened to have with you, for fear it should contain something contraband."

"What, every time I happened to walk through? Rather tiresome, is it not, Mignonette?"

"Sometimes. I have seen them examining a cart with bags or sacks, and sticking their bayonets,—no, not bayonets, but whatever they are,—through and through them. But once it was such fun. Miss Percival had taken me out for a drive, and when we came back she had a footstool, or rather a hassock, on the roof of the carriage. I forget what it was for. As we came through the gates we were stopped as usual, and the *gardes* asked what the footstool was. Miss Percival was in a great hurry, and she called out,—'Oh, ce n'est qu'un fauteuil!' The men looked quite mystified, but they allowed us to drive on at once, and we laughed till we cried at her mistake."

"It was enough to mystify any one I should think," said Mr. Vincent. "Did the Percivals often take you out with them?"

"When they were in Brussels, uncle. They never stayed more than a few weeks at a time."

One reminiscence after another came to Ina's mind, and Mr. Vincent enjoyed drawing them out, as much for her sake as for his own. At length they arrived at Madame Boucher's house, and were shown upstairs, by a maid whose face was new to Ina, into the old familiar parlour. No name was sent, but only a request to see Madame, who they were glad to find was

at home. Mr. Vincent and Antonia sat down, but Ina walked about, eagerly examining everything on the table, and feasting her eyes on the gilt clock which had been quite a friend of her childhood.

Presently the door opened, and Madame Boucher entered,—plump, lady-like, cheerful-looking as ever.

She bowed with her French air of politeness, evidently thinking that some new pupils were to be offered to her care, and Ina held back for a moment, with sparkling eyes, wondering if she would be recognized. Madame Boucher glanced at her, and looked away, then exclaimed,—

"No! am I wrong? Have I the pleasure to see Mr. Vincent? And can it indeed be *ma Mignonne?*"

She took Mr. Vincent's offered hand as she spoke, but the next moment Ina was in her arms, and she was kissing her, exclaiming, laughing, and almost crying, in a breath.

"No! I can hardly believe it! So grown! so altered! Ma pauvre enfant! Is it the illness which has changed you so? And all the pretty curls gone!"

"Oh, Madame, it is so nice to see you again," was all Ina could say at first, and then with sudden recollection she stepped back. "But you do not know my cousin, Antonia,—my *sister*, I mean."

"I did not know, but I could have guessed from

Mademoiselle's resemblance to Monsieur votre oncle," Madame answered, taking Antonia's hand with a graceful inclination. "Truly, Monsieur, I know not how to express to you my deep obligations for so kindly bringing to see me la Mignonne."

"She has not been well, as you know, Madame, and we thought a little change would do her good," said Mr. Vincent. "But she does not look very ill just now."

"Why, no," returned Madame Boucher, touching Ina's flushed cheek. "Not ill, and very happy. Ah, I need not ask whether I may hope to have my pupil back again. I could not wish such a thing for her. Truly it rejoices my heart to see her with such kind good friends. But you will let me see some little of her, now she is once again near to me."

"As much as possible, Madame. I imagine you are tolerably at liberty now, as these are the Midsummer holidays. We must try to organize a few expeditions together."

"I have no pupils with me now," said Madame, shaking her head. "Even the cousin of la Mignonne, Mary Williams, is returned home this summer, though she stays usually here, on account of the so long journey. She will be sorry to miss my unexpected visitors."

A few more remarks followed on both sides, and then Mr. Vincent rose.

"I think I must now say good-bye for a short time, Madame. But if you would like Mignonette to remain with you for an hour or two, I can call for her by and by."

"It will give you so much trouble, uncle," Ina said, but he put aside her objection with a smile, when he saw how pleased they both were with the proposal. Antonia was asked by Madame and pressed by Ina to stay, but she wisely declined, and went away with her father, though not without whispering to her cousin,—"You see, I think it best to give you an early opportunity of saying the worst about us that you may have in your mind."

Ina laughed, and when they were gone she returned to the sofa, sat down by Madame, and poured forth an eager description of the kindness, affection, and happiness, that she had found in her new home. She was only interrupted by an occasional question from her friend, and the narration lasted a considerable time.

"Indeed, ma chère Mignonne, I think you might be very very grateful," said Madame at length, when Ina fairly paused for breath. "It is not every poor girl that has such good relatives."

"Oh, Madame, I think very few indeed can have

such good ones. I cannot tell you one half that they have been to me. But there is one thing more that you ought to know. Uncle said I had better tell you."

"And that is—?" began Madame Boucher inquiringly.

"That we know now how much dear papa wished me to live at Rockstone," said Ina,—flushing, as she always did when she spoke on the subject.

"Indeed,—is it possible? And how can you know that? Your uncle truly appeared convinced of it when we saw him here last spring."

"It was in a letter from poor papa," said Ina. "He wrote it, Madame, the night that he died, and put it away in the secret drawer of his desk, meaning to post it next day. But he did not live till the morning, and there the letter has been for eight years, no one knowing anything about it, until the other day. My cousin Guy discovered the drawer by accident, when he was examining my desk."

Madame raised her hands, and exclaimed that it was like a romance.

"And you know now all about it!" she said. "But for eight years he kept the secret about you, and then wished it known. And just too late! The poor Monsieur! Was that it?"

"Yes,—there were reasons," said Ina, looking on

the floor. "Madame, I know it is safe with you, and you will not mention it again. He had done something that caused uncle Horace to lose a great deal of money, and then papa went abroad, and he thought he would keep quite away, and not trouble anybody again. Until just at last he felt that uncle Horace would have forgiven him, and he wrote,—just too late!"

"Too late," repeated Madame in a tone of commiseration. "The poor Monsieur. It is very sad. And yet I doubt not that he would be happy to know that his Mignonne was at last in so kind a home. I cannot see now, in conversing, that you are greatly altered by your illness. But that you are thinner, and your long curls all gone,—otherwise the face is still the same."

"I feel the same,—and you must not mind about my curls, Madame. I was growing quite too tall and old for them. Grandmamma had spoken several times of putting them up. When my hair is long again I must find some other way of doing it."

"It will not be perhaps equally becoming," said Madame Boucher, in rather a melancholy voice. "But almost any way will suit that little face, so I need not distress myself."

"About curls? Indeed I hope not," cried Ina merrily. "Oh, Madame, what an idea!"

"Ah! you have not yet come to that," said Madame, patting her cheek. "But never mind. Keep your simplicity so long as you can. It is all the prettier that it is so rare."

"You will very soon destroy it, Madame, at this rate," returned Ina, amused to find how much she now noticed the little flattering remarks which in old days she had taken as a matter of course. Madame Boucher saw this, laughed, and told her she was "more English than ever."

"But I do not wonder," she added. "If you were quite English before you ever see your own country, what must you not be after one whole year and a quarter spent there?"

"I shall never be too much of an Englishwoman to love you, Madame."

And with this promise Madame Boucher was well satisfied. After a time Mr. Vincent returned, and took Ina back to the hotel. It was growing dusk, and he could not well distinguish his companion's face, but she was silent and thoughtful during the first part of the walk. Presently he inquired,—

"Well, Mignonette,—are you trying to decide which place you prefer,—Brussels or Rockstone?"

"There is no need to think about it," said Ina earnestly. "I shall never wish to leave Rockstone

for any other home. I love Madame dearly, and I always shall, but I could not wish to leave you, uncle, even to go to her."

"And we could not wish to lose you, Mignonette You have been a great comfort and blessing in my house, dear child."

"I don't know how," murmured Ina rather incoherently.

"By the example of a loving Christian conduct,—by living for others instead of living for yourself," said Mr. Vincent. "Mignonette, you may say and think what you like,—but you have fully repaid, and more than repaid, all that I lost in the past. It is not I alone that say so. My mother fully agrees with me. As to Annie and the boys, I need not say what *their* opinion is upon the subject."

Ina's face was downcast and her cheeks flushing, but with no sorrowful emotion.

"I don't deserve that you should say such things," she half-whispered.

"If you quite understand what I mean, I will not say it again. Do you, Ina?"

But Ina attempted no answer. They reached the hotel, and went up into their sitting-room together. Lady Isabelle and Antonia were absent, unpacking in their bed-rooms. Mr. Vincent laid a hand on each

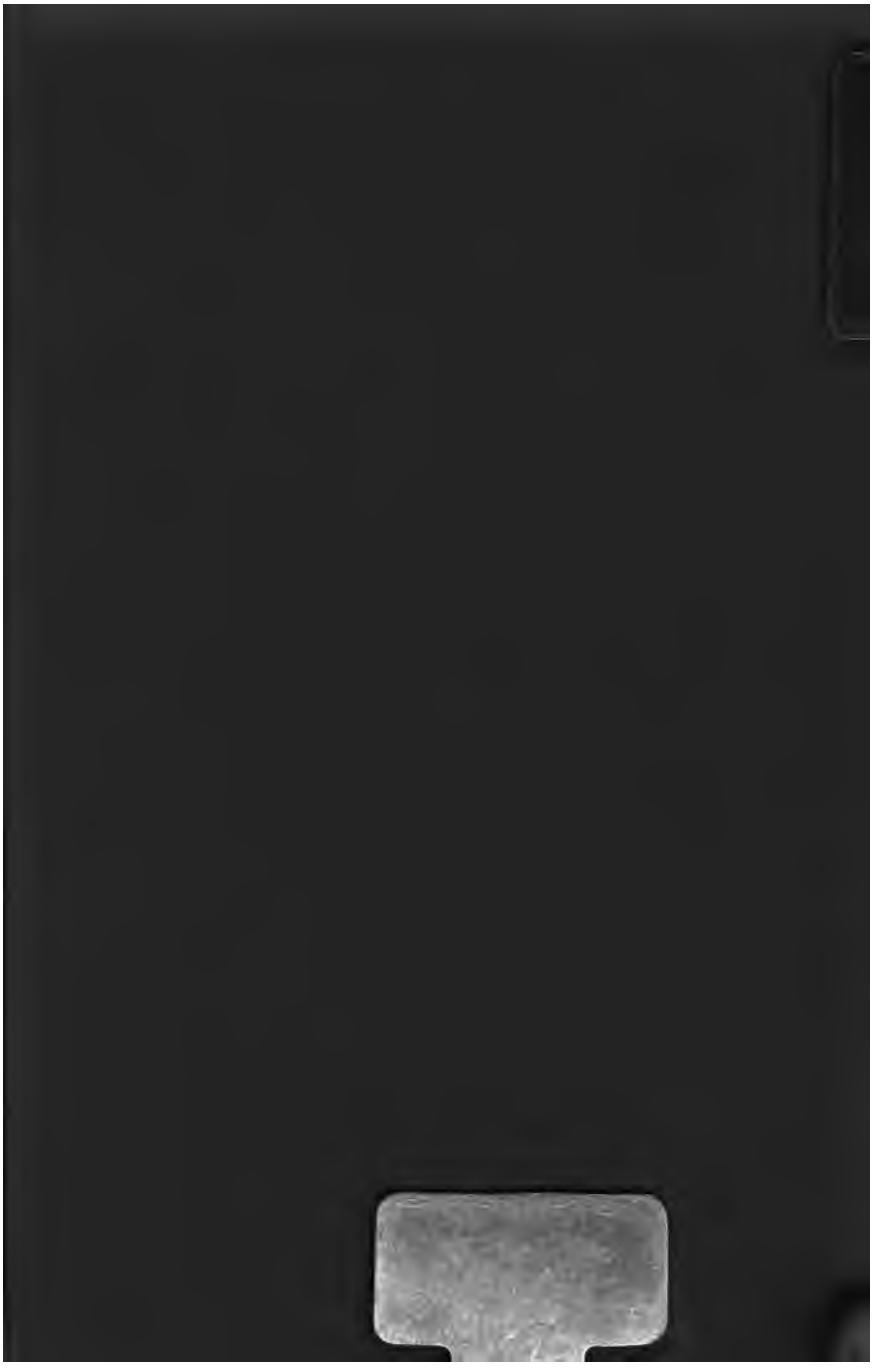
of Ina's shoulders, and looked with a smile into the drooping blushing face.

"Well, Mignonette?"

"I understand that you are the dearest kindest uncle that ever was," said Ina with a quick and mischievous though rather tearful flash of her eyes. Then hastily giving him a kiss, she ran away to her own room.

* * * * * *

Shall we leave Ina here? Is anything more needed? She has found a happy home, and kind loving relations. She is Antonia's sister, Mr. Vincent's daughter, Lady Isabelle's grandchild. But we might glance on over three or four years, and find that it was possible for her to become sister, daughter, and grandchild, not only by adoption, but in name and reality. Cyril was by that time an undergraduate at Cambridge. Guy had entered the army. Both however were at home,—and not they alone, but the Percivals, the Williamses, and Madame Boucher herself, were all present at Rockstone Leigh, on the day that Mignonette became the wife of her cousin, Aubrey Vincent.

THE END.

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